Under the Sunset

Harper's Novelettes

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GRACE ELLERY CHANNING
THE END OF THE JOURNEY

THOMAS A. JANVIER
THE SAGE-BRUSH HEN

ELIA W. PEATTIE
A MADONNA OF THE DESERT

MARIE MANNING
THE PROPHETESS OF THE LAND OF NO-SMOKE

PHILIP VERRILL MIGHELS
A LITTLE PIONEER

ELMORE ELLIOTT PEAKE
BACK TO INDIANA

CHARLES A. EASTMAN, M.D.
THE GRAY CHIEFTAIN

ZOE DANA UNDERHILL
THE INN OF SAN JACINTO

MAURICE KINGSLEY
TIO JUAN

JOSIAH FLYNT
JAMIE THE KID

Introduction

Undoubtedly it was the work of Bret Harte, bold in action, high in color, and simple in motive, which established an ideal of the Farthest West in literature. Europe, where he is still better known than any other American writer, still clings to that ideal; it keeps the fancy of the English as well as the Germans, the Russians, and the French. But American art, to which the West is better known with its changes from the gold-seeking days to those of the settled industries, has refined upon that ideal. Something vastly more complex speaks to us from both the hither and the thither slopes of the Sierras. The plains are conscious of their mysticism; the wild nature itself seeks a voice in the communion of savage man and savage beast. The old rollicking humor finds vent yet in temperament and incident, and Mr. Janvier's heroine suggests the

earlier heroines of the first master; but how far from his are such types as "The Madonna of the Desert" and "The Prophetess of the Land of No Smoke!" The delicate divinations of Mrs. Ellery Channing, the close, firm study of Mr. Mighels in frontier character, are equally surprising eventuations in fiction dealing with life in the region of Harte's daring and once fresh conventions. The homesickness aching through Mr. Peake's pathetic story of the returning exiles is all as different from the primal strain of hilarious fatalism, of melodramatic incident, as it is from the sad, plain dreadfulness of Mr. Kingsley's tragedy, or Mrs. Underhill's round, old-fashioned supernaturalism; and how remote in temperament is Mr. Flynt's tale of the boy tramp "beating" his way back to the States from Dr. Eastman's poetic piece of animism in "The Gray Chieftain."

The things are convincingly alike in their several excellence, and in their varying truth to the farther and nearer lands Under the Sunset. They are not only important now—fine art, genuine motive, original spirit—but they are extremely interesting and significant as suggestions of the great work to be done

in and about a region of America where the completion of the interoceanic communications and the drawing together of East and West seemed to paralyze the nascent consciousness of the Pacific shore in literature. Finally, in the immense geographical range of these admirable stories, we have some faint indications of the vastness as well as the richness of the field they touch.

W. D. H.

The End of the Journey

BY GRACE ELLERY CHANNING

THE train, a local, drew up to the primitive station with a ruder jolt and a shrieking whistle, and the woman got out. She stood a moment on the platform, looking off at the brown and dusty landscape,—it was summer and the land was dry,—her face, the while, arming silently for an approaching ordeal.

It had been a finely modelled face, to begin with; now it was as finely scored, with little lines here and there about the corners of the eyes and lips, as if the engraver Sorrow had followed the sculptor Life.

She had probably never been beautiful, but beautiful women would have exchanged with her for that something else which she was, and discerning women would have bartered their fine clothes for her secret of wearing simple ones. Her soft, excellently brushed hair was

thinly veined with gray; her costume was a darker gray; her gloves, fitted to the long hands within, unfashionably dainty. In brief, a lady, before the word was spoiled. Equally unmistakably, a lady at odds with her present errand, whatever that might be. The patient restraint of the fine mouth narrowly controlled a complete impatience, and the very carriage of her body and the height at which she held her head seemed in a manner to protest against some inner compulsion, —the distaste was visible through all the weariness of her eyes, gazing from the brown hills to the browner plains at their feet.

There was no one to meet her—which was not surprising, since she knew no one,—and after a moment's doubtful consulting of landmarks she set off down a long road opposite the station, lifting her skirt in one hand to clear the ankle-deep adobe dust, while with the finger-tips of the other she held—as we hold what we do not hold willingly—a small package, elaborately tied and sealed.

One house succeeded another at long intervals filled with straggling orange and lemon groves. At the eighth of these, and fully a quarter of a mile from the station, she hesitated a moment

before passing through the opening in the neglected cypress hedge and up the narrow path towards the house, unpainted and low, with the wide Californian porch and running vines which render the commonplace of the West so much more tolerable than the commonplace of the East.

It was a spot not incapable of charm, for there were shade-trees and growing things, but the drought had been at work, and the air of barren living somehow diffused itself mutely through the patch of drying vegetables and the shrivelled leaves of the deciduous growth to the house beyond. Even the dustless peppers looked dusty, thin, and forlorn.

The woman stopped short midway of the path. Her lips twitched and a new look passed into her eyes—keyed to silent endurance. The fastidious distaste of the moment before deepened into a revolt of her whole being—a revolt of race,—smiting her to a sudden impulse of sharp anger, followed by pity as sharp.

"Poor boy!"—it was only a muttered sound, but she feared she had cried it aloud; and closing her lips again in their habitual line, she went on up the path, with a sigh like a suppressed sob, carrying her head an unconscious inch

higher than before, her finger-tips tightening their protesting clutch.

Evidently she had been expected, for a younger woman appeared at the door and came out on the porch. For a moment they gazed at each other from the top and bottom of the steps before the elder woman spoke.

"You are Mrs. Hallette?"

"Yes, — and I expect you are his mother?"

"I am his mother."

They gazed at each other again.

"Won't you come up and sit down?" said the younger woman. She led the way into a small room opening from the porch and pushed forward a chair to the visitor, seating herself with a little fling in one opposite.

There was something sullen in her air—a mixture of defiance, embarrassment, and pride. Her heavy, dark, pretty hair—pretty, though not fine—was rolled in the Pompadour mode of the moment about her heavily round, youthful face. The face was not unpretty, either, in its softly massed contours and clear coloring. It was not extremely young, yet there was something almost childlike about it, and it had the fresh vitality of a not too nervous race—the

look one sees in the best peasant stock of Europe or occasionally among our backwoods girls. Her curved body had the same vital attraction; it would better have become one of the white-yoked, full-sleeved peasant costumes than it did the conventional shirt-waist and skirt she wore. There was a ring with a stone above the plain wedding-band on her brown, supple, capable worker's hand, and a prettily enamelled watch at her belt. The whole impression registered itself in an instant on the sensitive brain opposite.

The other had been surveying her equally, with a kind of fascinated gaze.

"I should have known you anywhere for his mother," she said. "You look so like him."

"Yes?"—the fine eyebrows lifted a little. "The resemblance is not usually thought to be so strong." It was as if she repelled it, as bringing her indefinitely nearer to something she shrank from; and then becoming suddenly aware of that instinct in herself and startled by it, she spoke again, hastily and with extreme gentleness. It was not her fault that the very tones of her voice seemed only to accentuate the gulf between herself and the other speaker. A voice, above all

things, is the gift of centuries. Beautiful voices, it is true, may be found anywhere, but one kind of beautiful voice is the product of ages of gentle speaking only.

"I am the bearer of a message from —my son; he wished me to give you this,"—and again it was not her fault that her finger-tips conveyed their protest faintly through their very manner of offering the package.

"Thank you,—he wrote he'd send it," said the younger woman, coloring slightly. She laid it unopened on her lap and returned to her fascinated study of the woman opposite.

"Perhaps you will kindly see that it is —all right; he sealed it himself."

The other colored again. "I guess it isn't necessary—if he sent it—and you brought it."

The pathetically clumsy intention of the phrase did not soften the face of the elder woman; she acknowledged it with a very slight bending of the head.

"I was also,—he wished me to bid you good-by."

The younger woman showed a shade of surprise. "Won't he come at all himself, then?"

"You don't seem to understand"—the low voice was sharp with intensity of

restrained feeling—"that he—has been very ill!"

For the first time the impassive lines of the other's face showed disturbance; her lips trembled slightly, and she cast a vaguely troubled glance out of eyes like a frightened animal's at the elder woman's, which met hers with a hard brightness.

"No," she said, "I didn't know; I'm sorry. I thought he hadn't seemed quite himself for some time,—that maybe that was why he acted so strange."

"'*Acted so strange!*'—'not quite himself!' Don't you know—couldn't you *see* he was frightfully ill — for — for *months?*" The words were jerked out with terrible intensity, between short, controlled breaths, but the voice never lifted, and the gloved hands lay quiet in the speaker's lap.

In spite of their implication, the woman at whom they were directed did not seem angered by them, but only vaguely troubled, as before.

"I'm sorry," she repeated. "He's taken it very hard;—he don't seem to—to have had any experience."

The elder woman sat back suddenly in her chair, as if something had broken which had heretofore held her upright.

"No," she said, in a painfully quiet

voice; "as you say,—he had had no experience. He thought the whole thing was real."

To her surprise, the shaft went home. The other drew herself up, flushing crimson,—and in so doing she became very handsome.

"I suppose you think I'm all to blame. Mothers always do. But I was in earnest too;—I thought it was all real. Those things will happen, you know."

The delicate stone face opposite immutably denied any such knowledge. "Those things" happened sometimes in the tenements, she would have told you; not in her world. But the other went on, oblivious, warming into a kind of effective energy.

"He took a great deal for granted from the first—but I did care; he wasn't just like any one I'd ever known; we were interested in the same things,—and I thought at the time I cared more than I did. Anyway"—she wound up with vigor—"he took a great deal on himself to tell you about it."

The elder woman winced ever so slightly. "I told you he was very ill."

"And I suppose you blame me for it all?"—the eyes, no longer like a frightened animal's, challenged hers with a

certain honest resentment, and the elder woman drew a sharp breath.

"I blame you for your lack of humanity,—for your unkindness,—for failing him when you had brought him to—to such a pass. I don't judge about the rest,—perhaps you couldn't help it—either of you; I don't know,—I don't judge,—I don't *want* to judge. But to let him hang on in that miserable way,—not to see that it was ruining him—not to know—not to care—not to have common pity,—common humanity,—after—after *that*—" She broke off suddenly, lifting her head and looking away from the woman, her lips set in one white line.

"I didn't understand he was so bad off," said the other, almost humbly, and the hearer made a dumb gesture of relinquishment. What was the use indeed? She *could* not understand. It was all contained in that.

The elder woman sat silent.

"I suppose *he* hates me now, too?"

"He has never said one word about you which was not beautiful,"—still in that painfully quiet tone. "I told you,—he believed the whole thing."

Again it was a surprise to her when the face opposite broke suddenly up into a chaos of rudimentary emotions and the

woman burst into tears. Her visitor surveyed in apathetic astonishment. She had really cared, then? Some feeling did reside under that envelope of sturdy well-being,—that *hide* of the spirit?

The storm was quickly over. With a vigorous touch the young woman wiped away the tears, murmuring a word half protest and half apology.

"You wouldn't understand;—we were raised different, I expect. You wouldn't understand."

The abrupt throwing back of her own conclusion of a moment ago struck the elder woman. She cast a sharp glance at the face before her, still quivering with feeling through all its curious settled submission. Not understand! What least aspect of the whole tragedy was there that she did not understand only too well, she wondered with bitterness. What other brain ached like hers with limitless capacity for understanding,—for weighing to its final atom every wretched phase of the uncomplex drama and counting its whole intricate cost? Not understand!

"There's something he left here—if you don't mind taking it," said the other, still submissively, and the elder woman made a mechanical gesture of assent.

"You wouldn't understand," — the words continued to sound in her ears. Tacitly excusing had been the woman's tone, in contrast to her own unuttered accusation, but the words rankled none the less,—perhaps all the more. She sat there repeating numbly the irritating phrase, even while she said to herself that it did not matter—that nothing mattered; and her unseeing eyes wandered about the room, till across their blank field of vision another iteration pressed home to her brain.

What was so familiar—so insistently familiar—about this room? She roused herself keenly now, and found an immediate answer. Object after object claimed her,—things dear, things alive, things eloquent, fragments of home, fragments of her son's home, things that were like bits of the boy himself,—they were everywhere, and crying aloud after the manner of dumb things.

She was on her feet in a moment. There was the Madonna bought by the boy's father when the boy was born; it had always hung above his bed. There was his favorite "Sleeping Faun," bought the year they went abroad after his triumphal college Commencement; the rug picked up in the bazars of Cairo

was there. And there, doing duty as a paper-weight, was the carved shepherd boy from the Swiss canton; little old sketches,—a Venetian vase,—the room was full of the boy! And not only the boy. She was a woman of fetishes—a woman who had lost much—and to whom her dead lived again in their dumb possessions; she walked to the bookcase and took down book after book with a rapid hand. Here was his father's Ruskin,—his own favorite Shelley,—his Emerson (another gift, that, from father to son); and here—she had not thought it possible, even in the pang of recognition—here, dim with three generations of handling, its priceless binding fit casket for the treasure of the title-page within, where the dedication to the boy's great-grandfather, from such a hand on such a glorious date, made in itself a heritage of pride,—here, dim crimson in its superb age, was the family Plutarch. It had been put in the boy's proud hands by his father as a graduation gift.

Scarlet lines struck across her cheek. For a moment she thought of him not as a mother thinks of her son, but as a woman of race thinks of the man who betrays it. Then something carried her indignant eyes to the shelf above.

There was a little clock on it—a simple, homely thing, ticking away cheerfully. That too was his; it had been given him to cheer the lagging hours of a childish convalescence, and it had been his fond fancy to keep it with him ever since. He had carried it to college; he had taken it to Europe; he had brought it here. The mother stood looking and looking at it, but she did not touch it with her yearning fingers; something interposed between. Her face was changed when she turned away and included the whole room once more in her lingering gaze from object to object. A poor, bare little room—without these things; a room the poor, foolish, but magnificently loving boy had transformed with his treasure, bringing it where his heart always was, seeking instinctively to enclose this woman in the home to which he dreamed of one day bringing her. It invested his folly with a certain dignity. At least he had loved as became him and his kind, unsordidly, uncalculatingly, with a high belief in what he loved; and in the wreck of his youth there had been something his mother could respect.

She heard him fondly dwelling on the qualities of mind and heart of this wom-

an,—the thirst he ascribed to her for books, pictures, all the adornments of that life to which he had been born. She had "never had a gift till he gave her one,"—she lacked "nothing but opportunity to make her his mother's intellectual equal." And so—and so he had brought her the Plutarch.

She was standing gazing at it again where she had replaced it on the shelf, when the other returned with a little package. Mechanically she received it into her own hand; for the first time she was observing that the woman's forehead was good.

Meantime a wave of that ready color of hers had swept into the younger woman's face; she had caught, as she entered, the other's focussed gaze.

"I expect," she exclaimed, and it was plain the shock of the idea was new to her, "you think I ought to give all these back!"

In their turn her eyes made that journey about the room, but leaping with the swiftness of familiarity from one dear object to another. How dear was easy to be seen; it was all a little world of delicate beauty and rich possession which slipped inch by inch away from her as the dumb eyes travelled on. The loss of

the man had been nothing; this denuded her universe, reducing it to the image of the barren garden outside. It denuded her life too; and she had been totally unprepared,—totally unforeseeing of it. Shut out by the facts of her existence—daughter of workers, wife of a worker, a worker herself—from the possibility of acquiring these things which yet she had the capacity to long for, she found herself brought face to face in a moment with the old destitution of her past. And she was patheticallly unprepared.

So was the other; she understood now what her son had stood for in this life. Heretofore she had seen it always as an unequal contest between the experienced —because the married—woman and the inexperienced, ardent, visionary boy, the child of a long line of dreamers; now the obverse revealed itself,—the darling child of fortune, with his immense inherited advantages and luxurious gifts of intellect, tempting the starved and passionately appetent brain of labor. It must have gone far to equalize the contest. With her own pitiless inheritance of justice she acknowledged it, and it was a pang the more. There had not been one victim, but two. And if the

boy had but paid the price of centuries of deficit, the woman had but as helplessly avenged her defrauded past. Her very inability to respond to certain finer ranges of sensibilities—what was it but part and condition of that endured fraud?

For her forehead was good and her eyes were hungry.

"I expect," she repeated (and perhaps it was the merest chance that her hand, trembling across the bookcase, touched one lingering moment the dim crimson Plutarch), "I ought to send them back?"

She raised two eyes full of honest, suffering purpose, but the other turned away from them, putting up her hands involuntarily as if to push away the question—the question which marked the impassable gulf between herself and this woman as nothing else could have done, and yet, as nothing else could have done, either, drew her across it with a vastness of sudden human pity in direct proportion to her own fierce sense of personal revolt.

"No—no," she cried; "that was between *you!*" Then added, "But I know that he would say—*keep them!*"

She turned again and gazed at the bookshelves and the Plutarch—dimmer

still in its crimson binding the longer she gazed. She forgot the room, the woman,—even for a moment her son. She was seeing once more, down the long reach of her dearly remembered years, that gentle, learned, aristocratic judge. He had been a judge of men as well, of infinite kindliness, and tolerant without bounds.

She did not know how long she stood there, but she recalled herself with a start, to find that other figure still beside her watching dumbly. And never in the world—that kindly judge of men must have smiled to see—had she looked a greater lady than as she turned to gaze upon it kindly with an outstretched hand.

"Good-by."

The other clung to it a moment. "Oh, I wish I had you for a friend!" she exclaimed, adding, chokingly, "You won't think hard of me?"

The elder woman shook her head, loosened her hand gently, and without another glance about her went out and down the steps. The younger, in the doorway, watched wistfully till the drooping peppers hid the last fold of the gray gown and the gray head carried high.

Carried high,—for where had been the use of telling her that the boy was dead?

The Sage-brush Hen

BY THOMAS A. JANVIER

SHE blew in one day on Hill's coach from Santa Fé—Hill ran the coach that year the end of the track was at Palomitas, it being shorter going up that way to Pueblo and Denver and Leadville than round by the Atchison and changing at El Moro to the Narrow Gauge—and, being up on the box with Hill, she was so all over dust that Cherry sung out to him, "Where'd you get your sage-brush hen from?" And the name stuck.

More folks in Palomitas had names that had tumbled to 'em like that than the kind that had come regular. And even when they sounded regular you never could be dead sure they was. Regular names used to get lost pretty often coming across the Plains in those days—more'n a few finding it better, about as they got to the Missouri, to leave behind what they'd been called by back

East and draw something new from the pack. Making a change like that was apt to be wholesomer, and often saved talk.

Hill said the Hen was more fun coming across from Santa Fé than a basketful of monkeys; and she was all the funnier, he said, because when he picked her up at the Fonda she looked like as if butter wouldn't melt in her mouth and started in with her monkey-shines so sort of quiet and demure. Along with her, waiting at the Fonda, was an old gent with spectacles who turned out to be a mine-sharp—one of them fellows the government sends out to the Territory to write up serious in books all the fool stories prospectors and such unload on 'em: the kind that needs to be led, and 'll eat out of your hand. The Hen and the old gent and Hill had the box seat, the Hen in between; and she was that particular about her skirts climbing up, and about making room after she got there, that Hill said he sized her up himself for an officer's wife going East.

Except to say thank you, and talk polite that way, she didn't open her head till they'd got clear of the town and were going slow in that first bit of bad road among the sand-hills; and it was

the old gent speaking to her—telling her it was a fine day, and he hoped she liked it—that set her stamps a-going a little then. She allowed the weather was about what it ought to be, and said she was much obliged and it suited her; and then she got her tongue in behind her teeth again as if she meant to keep it there—till the old gent took a fresh start by asking her if she'd been in the Territory long. She said polite she hadn't, and was quiet for a minute. Then she got out her pocket-handkerchief and put it up to her eyes and said she'd been in it longer'n she wanted, and was glad she was going away. Hill said her talking that way made him feel kind of curious himself; but he didn't have no need to ask questions — the old gent saving him that trouble by going for her sort of fatherly and pumping away at her till he got the whole thing.

It come out scrappy, like as might be expected, Hill said; and so natural-sounding he thought he must be asleep and dreaming—he knowing pretty well what was going on in the Territory, and she telling about doings that was news to him and the kind he'd been sure to hear a lot of if they'd ever really come off. Hill said he wished he could tell it

all as she did—speaking low, and ketching her breath in the worst parts, and mopping at her eyes with her pocket-handkerchief—but he couldn't; and all he could say about it was it was better'n any theatre show he'd ever seen. The nubs of it was, he said, that she said her husband had taken out a troop from Fort Wingate against the Apaches (Hill knew blame well up there in the Navajo country was no place to look for Apaches) and the troop had been ambushed in a cañon in the Zuni Mountains (which made the story still tougher) and every man of 'em, along with her "dear Captain," as she called him, had lost his hair. "His loved remains are where those fierce creatures left them," she said. "I have not even the sad solace of properly burying his precious bones!" And she cried.

The old gent was quite broke up, Hill said, and took a-hold of her hand fatherly—she was a powerful fine-looking woman—and said she had his sympathy; and when she eased up on her crying so she could talk she said she was much obliged—and felt it all the more, she said, because he looked like a young uncle of hers who'd brought her up, her father being dead, till she was married East

to her dear Captain and had come out to the Territory with him to his doom.

Hill said it all went so smooth he took it down himself at first—but he got his wind while she was crying, and he asked her what her Captain's name was, and what was his regiment; telling her he hadn't heard of any trouble up around Wingate, and it was news to him Apaches was in those parts. She give him a dig in the ribs with her elbow—as much as to tell him he wasn't to ask no such questions—and said back to him her dear husband was Captain Chiswick of the Twelfth Cavalry; and it had been a big come-down for him, she said, when he got his commission in the Regulars, after he'd been a Volunteer brigadier-general in the war.

Hill knew right enough there wasn't no Twelfth Cavalry nowhere, and he knew the boys at Wingate were A and F troops of the Fourth; but he ketched on to the way she was giving it to the old gent—and so *he* give *her* a dig in the ribs, and said he'd known Captain Chiswick intimate, and he was as good a fellow as ever was, and it was a blame pity he was killed. She give him a dig back again, at that—and was less particular about making room on his side,

The old gent took it all in, just as it come along; and after she'd finished up about the Apaches killing her dear Captain he wanted to know where she was heading for—because if she was going home East, he said, he was going East himself and could give her a father's care.

She said back to him, pleasant-like, that a young man like him couldn't well be fathering an old lady like her, though it was obliging of him to offer; but, anyway, she wasn't going straight back East, because she had to wait a while at Palomitas for a remittance she was expecting to pay her way through—and she wasn't any too sure about it, she said, whether she'd get her remittance; or, if she did get it, when it would come. Everything bad always got down on you at once, she said; and just as the cruel savages had slain her dear Captain along come the news the bank East he'd put his money in had broke the worst kind. Her financial difficulties wasn't a patch on the trouble her sorrowing heart was giving her, she said; but she allowed they added what she called pangs of bitterness to her deeper pain.

The old gent—he wasn't a fool clean through—asked her what was the mat-

ter with her government transportation; she having a right to transportation, being an officer's widow going home. Hill said he gave her a nudge at that, as much as to say the old gent had her. She didn't faze a bit, though. It was her government transportation she was waiting for, she cracked back to him smooth and natural; but such things had to go all the way to Washington to be settled, she said, and then come West again—Hill said he 'most snickered out at that—and she'd known cases when red tape had got in the way and transportation hadn't been allowed at all. Then she sighed terrible, and said it might be a long, long while before she could get home again to her little boy—who was all there was left her in the world. Her little Willy was being took care of by his grandmother, she said, and he was just his father's own handsome self over again—and she got out her pocket-handkerchief and jammed it up to her eyes.

Her left hand was lying in her lap, sort of casual, and the old gent got a-hold of it and said he didn't know how to tell her how sorry he was for her. Talking from behind her pocket-handkerchief, she said such sympathy was precious; and then she went on, kind of pitiful, saying

she s'posed her little Willy'd have forgot all about her before she'd get back to him —and she cried some more. Hill said she did it so well he was half took in himself for a minute, and felt so bad he went to licking and swearing at his mules.

After a while she took a brace—getting down her pocket-handkerchief, and calling in the hand the old gent was a-holding—and said she must be brave, like her dear Captain 'd always been, so he'd see when he was a-looking at her from heaven she was doing the square thing. And as to having to wait around before she went East, she said, in one way it didn't make any matter—seeing she'd be well cared for and comfortable at Palomitas staying in the house of the Baptist minister, who'd married her aunt.

Hill said when she went to talking about Baptist ministers and aunts in Palomitas he shook so laughing inside he 'most fell off the box. Except the Mexican padre who belonged there—the one that made a record, and Bishop Lamy had to bounce—and sometimes the French one from San Juan, who was a good fellow and hadn't a fly on him anywhere, there wasn't a fire-escape ever showed himself in Palomitas; and as

to the ladies of the town—well, the ladies wasn't just what you'd call the aunt kind. It's a cold fact that that year when the end of the track stuck there Palomitas was about the cussedest town there was in the whole Territory—and so it was no more'n natural Hill should pretty near bust himself trying to hold in his laughing when the Hen took to talking so offhand about Palomitas and Baptist ministers and aunts. She felt how he was shaking, and jammed him hard with her elbow to keep him from letting his laugh out and giving her away.

Hill said they'd got along to Pojuaque by the time the Hen had finished telling about herself, and the fix she was in because she had to wait along with her aunt in Palomitas till her transportation come from Washington—and she just sick to get East and grab her little Willy in her arms. And the old gent was that interested in it all, Hill said, it was a sight to see how he went on.

At Pojuaque the coach always made a noon stop, and the team was changed and the passengers eat lunch at old man Bouquet's. He was a Frenchman, old man Bouquet was; but he'd been in the Territory from 'way back, and he'd got

a nice garden round his house and fixed things up French style. His strongest hold was his wine-making. He made a first-class drink, as drinks of that sort go; and, for its kind, it was pretty strong. As his cooking was first class too, Hill's passengers — and the other folks that stopped for grub there—always wanted to make a good long halt.

The old gent, Hill said, knew how to talk French, and that made old man Bouquet extra obliging—and he set up a rattling good lunch and fetched out some of the wine he said he was in the habit of keeping for himself, seeing he'd got somebody in the house for once who really knew the difference between good and bad. He fixed up a table out in the garden—where he'd a queer tree, all growed together, he thought a heap of—and set down with 'em himself; and Hill said it was one of the pleasantest lunches he'd eat in all his life.

The Hen and the old gent got friendlier and friendlier—she being more cheerful when she'd been lunching a while, and getting to talking so comical she kept 'em all on a full laugh. Now and then, though, she'd pull up sudden and kind of back away—making out she didn't want it to show so much—and get

her pocket-handkerchief to her eyes and snuffle; and then she'd pull herself together sort of conspicuous, and say she didn't want to spoil the party, but she couldn't help thinking how long it was likely to be before she'd see her little boy. And then the old gent would say that such tender motherliness did her credit, and hers was a sweet nature, and he'd hold her hand till she took it away.

Hill said the time passed so pleasant he forgot how it was going, and when he happened to think to look at his watch he found he'd have to everlastingly hustle his mules to get over to Palomitas in time to ketch the Denver train. He went off in a tearing hurry to hitch up, and old man Bouquet went along to help him—the old gent saying he guessed he and Mrs. Chiswick would stay setting where they was, it being cool and comfortable in the garden, till the team was put to. They set so solid, Hill said, they didn't hear him when he sung out to 'em he was ready; and he said he let his mouth go wide open and yelled like h—ll. (Hill always talked that careless way. He didn't mean no harm by it. He said it was just a habit he'd got into driving mules.) They not coming, he went to hurry 'em, he said—and as he come up

behind 'em the Hen was stuffing something into her frock, and the old gent was saying: "I want you to get quickly to your dear infant, my daughter. You can return at your convenience my trifling loan. And now I will give you a fatherly kiss—"

But he didn't, Hill said—because the Hen heard Hill's boots on the gravel and faced round so quick she spoiled his chance. He seemed a little jolted, Hill said; but the Hen was so cool, and talked so pleasant and natural about the good lunch they'd been having, and what a fine afternoon it was, he braced up and got to talking easy too.

Then they all broke for the coach, and got away across the Tesuque River and on through the sand-hills—with Hill cutting away at his mules and using words to 'em fit to blister their hides, and when they fetched the Cañada they were about up again to schedule time. After the Mexican who kept the Santa Cruz post-office had made the mess he always did with the mail matter, and had got the cussing he always got from Hill, they started off again—coming slow through that bit of extra-heavy road along by the Rio Grande, but getting to the deepo at Palomitas to ketch the Denver train.

All the way over from Pojuaque, Hill said, he could see out of the corner of his eye the old gent was nudging up to the Hen with his shoulder, friendly and sociable; and he said he noticed the Hen was a good deal less particular about making room. The old gent flushed up and got into a regular temper, Hill said, when Cherry sung out as they pulled into the deepo platform, "Where'd you get your sage-brush hen from?"—and that way give her what stuck fast for her name.

As it turned out, they might have kept on lunching as long as they'd a mind to at Pojuaque; and Hill might have let his mules take it easy, without tiring himself swearing at 'em, on a dead walk —there being a washout in the Comanche Cañon, up above the Embudo, that held the train. It wasn't much of a washout, the conductor said; but he said he guessed all hands would be more comfortable waiting at Palomitas, where there were things doing, than they would be setting still in the cañon while the track gang finished their job—and he said he reckoned the train wouldn't start for about three hours.

The Hen and the old gent was standing on the deepo platform, where they'd land-

ed from the coach; and Hill said as he was taking his mails across to the express-car he heard him asking her once more if she hadn't better come right along East to her lonely babe; and promising to take a father's care of her all the way. The Hen seemed to be in two minds about it for a minute, Hill said; and then she thanked him, sweet as sugar, for his goodness to her in her time of trouble; and told him it would be a real comfort to go East with such a kind escort to take care of her—but she said it wouldn't work, because she was expected in Palomitas, and not stopping there would be disappointing to her dear uncle and aunt.

It was after sundown, and getting duskish, while they were talking; and she said she must be getting along. The old gent said he'd like to go with her; but she said he mustn't think of it, as it was only a step to the parsonage and she knew the way. While he was keeping on telling her she really must let him see her safe with her relatives, up come Santa Fé Charley — and Charley sung out: "Hello, old girl,—so you've got here! I was looking for you on the coach, and I thought you hadn't come."

Hill said he began to shake with laughing, as he was sure it would be a dead

give-away for her—Santa Fé being the dealer at the Forest Queen, and about the toughest tough there was in town. Charley didn't look tough, though. He always dressed toney, all in black, with a long frock coat and a black felt hat —so he looked like he'd just come off Fifth Avenue—and a white tie. It helped him in his business, sometimes, dressing that way.

Hill said the Hen give a little jump when he sung out to her, but she didn't turn a hair. "Dear Uncle Charley, I am *so* glad to see you!" she said—and went right on, speaking to the old gent: "This is my uncle, the Baptist minister, sir, come to take me to the parsonage to my dear aunt. It's almost funny to have so young an uncle. Aunt's young too— you see, grandfather married a second time. We're more like sister and brother —being so near of an age; and he always will talk to me free and easy, like he always did—though I tell him now he's a minister it don't sound well." And then she whipped round to Charley, so quick he hadn't time to get a word in edge-wise, and said to him: "I hope Aunt Jane's well, and didn't have to go up to Denver—as she said she might in her last letter—to look after Cousin Mary.

And I do hope you've finished the painting she said was going on at the parsonage—so you can take me in there till my transportation comes and I can start East. This kind gentleman, who's going up on to-night's train, has been offering—and it's just as good of him, even if I can't go—to escort me home to my dear baby; and he's been just full of sympathy over my dear husband Captain Chiswick's loss."

Hill said he never knew anybody take cards as quick as Santa Fé took the cards the Hen was giving him. "I'm very happy to meet you, sir," he said to the old gent; "and most grateful to you for your kindness to my poor niece Rachel in her distress. We have been sorrowing over her during Captain Chiswick's long and painful illness—"

"My dear Captain had been sick for three months, and got out of his bed to go and be killed with his men by those dreadful Apaches," the Hen cut in.

"—and when the news came of the massacre," Charley went right on, as cool as an iced drink, "our hearts almost broke for her. Captain Chiswick was a splendid gentleman, sir; one of the finest officers ever sent out to this Territory. His loss is a bad thing for the Service;

but it is a worse thing for my poor niece —left forsaken with her sweet babes. They are noble children, sir; worthy of their noble sire!"

"Oh, Uncle Charley!" said the Hen. "Didn't you get my letter telling you my little Jane died of croup? I've only my little Willy, now!" And she kind of gagged.

"My poor child! My poor child!" said Santa Fé. "I did not know that death had winged a double dart at you like that—your letter never came." And then he said to the old gent: "The mail service in this Territory, sir, is just about as bad as it can be. The government ought to be ashamed!"

Hill said while they was giving it and taking it that way he 'most choked —particular as the old gent took it all down whole.

Hill said the three of 'em was sort of quiet and sorrowful for a minute, and then Santa Fé said: "It is too bad, Rachel, but your aunt Jane did have to go up to Denver yesterday—a despatch came saying Cousin Mary's taken worse. And the parsonage is in such a mess still with the painters that I've moved over to the Forest Queen Hotel. But you can come there too—it's kept by an officer's

widow, you know, and is most quiet and respectable—and you'll be 'most as comfortable waiting there till your transportation comes along as you would be if I could take you home."

Hill said hearing the Forest Queen talked about as quiet and respectable, and old Tenderfoot Sal, who kept it, called an officer's widow, so set him to shaking he had to get to where there was a keg of railroad spikes and set down on it and hold his sides with both hands.

Santa Fé turned to the old gent, Hill said—talking as polite as a Pullman conductor—and told him since he'd been so kind to his unhappy niece he hoped he'd come along with 'em to the hotel too—where he'd be more comfortable, Santa Fé said, getting something to eat and drink than he would be kicking around the deepo waiting till they'd filled in the washout and the train could start.

Hill said the Hen gave Santa Fé a queer sort of look at that, as much as to ask him if he was dead sure he had the cards for that lead. Santa Fé gave her a look back again, as much as to say he knew what was and what wasn't on the table; and then he went on to the old gent, speaking pleasant, telling him likely it might be a little bit noisy over

at the hotel—doing her best, he said, Mrs. Major Rogers couldn't help having noise sometimes, things being so rough and tumble out there on the frontier; but he had a private room for his study, where he wrote his sermons, he said, and got into it by a side door—and so he guessed things wouldn't be too bad.

That seemed to make the Hen easy, Hill said; and away the three of 'em went together to the Forest Queen. Hill knew it was straight enough about the private room and the side door—Santa Fé had it to do business in for himself, on the quiet, when he didn't have to deal; and Hill 'd known of a good many folks who'd gone in that private room by that side door and hadn't come out again till Santa Fé'd scooped their pile. But it wasn't no business of his, he said; and he said he was glad to get shut of 'em so he might get the chance to let out the laughing that fairly was hurting his insides.

As they were going away from the deepo, Hill said, he heard Santa Fé telling the old gent he was sorry it was getting so dark—as he'd like to take him round so he could see the parsonage, and the new church they'd just finished building and was going to put an organ in as soon as they'd raised more funds; but

it wasn't worth while going out of their way, he said, because they wouldn't show to no sort advantage with the light so bad. As the only church in Palomitas was the Mexican mud one about two hundred years old, and as the nearest thing to a parsonage was the padre's house that Denver Jones had rented and had his faro-bank in, Hill said he guessed Charley acted sensible in not trying to show the old gent around that part of the town.

Hill said after he'd got his supper he thought he'd come down to the deepo and sort of wait around there; on the chance he'd ketch on—when the old gent come over to the train—to what Santa Fé and the Hen 'd been putting upon him. Sure enough, he did.

Along about ten o'clock a starting order come down to the agent—the track gang by that time having the washout so near fixed it would be fit by the time the train got there to go across—and the agent sent word over to the Forest Queen to the old gent, who was the only Pullman passenger, he'd better be coming along.

In five minutes or so he showed up. He wasn't in the best shape, Hill said, and Santa Fé and the Hen each of 'em was giving him an arm; though what he

seemed to need more'n arms, Hill said, was legs—the ones he had not being in first-class order and working bad. But he didn't make no exhibition of himself, and talked right enough—only that he spoke sort of short and scrappy—and the three of 'em was as friendly together as friendly could be. Hill said he didn't think it was any hurt to listen, things being the way they were, and he edged up close to 'em—while they stood waiting for the porter to light up the Pullman—and though he couldn't quite make sense of all they was saying he did get on to enough of it to size up pretty close how they'd put the old gent through.

"Although it is for my struggling church, a weak blade of grass in the desert," Santa Fé was saying when Hill got the range of 'em, "I cannot but regret having taken from you your splendid contribution to our parish fund in so unusual, I might almost say in so unseemly a way. That I have returned to you a sufficient sum to enable you to prosecute your journey to its conclusion places you under no obligation to me. Indeed, I could not have done less—considering the very liberal loan that you have made to my poor niece to enable her to return quickly to her helpless babe.

As I hardly need tell you, that loan will be returned promptly—as soon as Mrs. Captain Chiswick gets East and is able to disentangle her affairs."

"Indeed it will," the Hen put in. "My generous benefactor shall be squared with if I have to sell my clothes!"

"Mustn't think of such a thing. Catch cold," the old gent said. "Pleasure's all mine to assist such a noble woman in her unmerited distress. And now I shall have happiness, and same time sorrow, to give her fatherly kiss for farewell."

The Hen edged away a little, Hill said, and Santa Fé shortened his grip a little on the old gent's arm—so his fatherly kissing missed fire. But he didn't seem to notice, and said to Santa Fé: "Never knew a minister know cards like you. Wonderful! And wonderful luck what you held. Played cards a good deal myself. Never could play like you!"

Santa Fé steadied the old gent, Hill said, and said to him in a kind of explaining way: "As I told you, my dear sir, in my wild college days—before I got light on my sinful path and headed for the ministry—I was reckoned something out of the common as a card-player, and what the profane call luck used to be with me all the time. Of

course, since I humbly—but, I trust, helpfully—took to being a worker in the vineyard, I have not touched those devil's picture-books; nor should I have touched them to-night but for my hope that a little game would help to while away your time of tedious waiting. As for playing for money, that would have been quite impossible if it had not been for my niece's suggestion that my winnings —in case such came to me—should be added to our meagre parish fund. I trust that I have not done wrong in yielding to my impulse. At least I have to sustain me the knowledge that if you, my dear sir, are somewhat the worse, my impoverished church is much the better for our friendly game of chance."

Hill said hearing Santa Fé Charley talking about chance in any game where he had the dealing was so funny it was better'n going to the circus. But the old gent took it right enough—and the Hen added on: "Yes, Uncle Charley can get the organ he's been wanting so badly for his church, now. And I'm sure we'll all think of how we owe its sweet music to you every time we hear it played!"—and she edged up to him again, so he could hold her hand. "It must make you very, very happy, sir," she kept on, speaking

kind of low and gentle, but not coming as close as he wanted her, "to go about the world doing such generous-hearted good deeds! I'm sure I'd like to thank you enough—only there isn't any fit words to thank you in—for your noble-hearted generous goodness to me!"

The old gent hauled away on her hand, Hill said, trying to get her closer, and said back to her: "Words quite unnecessary. Old man's heart filled with pleasure obliging such dear child. Never mind about words. Accept old man's fatherly kiss, like daughter, for good-by."

But he missed it that time too, Hill said—and Hill said, speaking in his careless cuss-word way, it was pretty d—n rough on him what poor luck in fatherly kisses he seemed to have—because just then the train-conductor swung his lantern and sung out, "All aboard!"

That ended things. Before the old gent knew what had got him, Santa Fé and the Hen had boosted him up the steps on to the platform of the Pullman—where the Pullman conductor got a grip on him just in time to save him from spilling—and then the train pulled out: with the Pullman conductor keeping him steady, and he throwing back good-by kisses to the Hen with both hands.

Hill said the Hen and Santa Fé kept quiet till the hind lights showed beyond the end of the deepo platform: and then the Hen grabbed Santa Fé round the neck and just hung on to him—so full of laugh she was limp—while they both roared. And Hill said he roared too. It was the most comical bit of business, he said, he'd tumbled to in all his born days!

It wasn't until the train got clear round the curve above the station, Hill said, that Charley and the Hen could pull 'emselves together so they could talk. Then the Hen let a-go of Santa Fé's neck and said comical—speaking kind of precise and toney, like as if she was an officer's wife sure enough: "You'd better return to your study, dear Uncle Charles, and finish writing that sermon you said we'd interrupt you in about caring for the sheep as well as the lambs!"

And then they went off together yelling, Hill said, over to the Forest Queen.

A Madonna of the Desert

BY ELIA W. PEATTIE

THE "Dancers" trip it for twenty miles along the Mojave Desert—grotesque forms in red lava rock, fixed in a horrible static saraband. The trail to Camp Crowe leads through this mocking company and takes its name from them, though for the last twenty-five miles it emerges from the "Ball Room" and climbs a dun mesa which terminates in a fortresslike outcropping of quartz, which is at once the lure and the shelter of the men who live at its base.

On a certain March day in 1899 the overland stopped at San Miguel—an almost unprecedented event—and let off two passengers. The man was lifted down carefully by the train crew. The woman, forgetful of self, neglected the casual hand of the porter, offered for her assistance.

"Well, ma'am," said the conductor,

"there's the wagon to meet you. I swear, that takes a burden off my mind. Now you're all right, ma'am; though I do hate to leave you here among them blamed Dancers. Here's the man to meet you, ma'am. And I'm thankful you got through without any—any accident."

He gave a swift clasp to the woman's hand and swung on the slow-moving train. Her companion sat on the embankment, leaning against her, as she waved a farewell to the men who had helped her through her long and cruel journey, and then turned to greet the driver of the wagon her husband's cousin had sent from Camp Crowe. The supply-wagon was visible a little way off, hitched to four "clay-bank" mules — creatures which suited their environment in every respect, and at a comparatively short distance melted completely into the monochrome of the desert. The driver of the wagon had a stretcher with him, as if quite prepared for the helplessness of his passenger. He and the woman carried the sick man to the wagon, the man on the stretcher saving his strength in every way. He did not so much as trouble himself to look around, but had the air of one who guards a very precious thing and cannot afford to have his at-

tention diverted. He did, indeed, guard the one thing that money, science, and faith cannot supply—the light of life, which flickered low in its socket and which a breath would extinguish.

The woman had a voice both cheerful and clear, and as she staggered along over the rough embankment, carrying her end of the stretcher, she said:

"It's such a relief to find you here waiting! When I was told that the train never stopped here at San Miguel's unless it was signalled I realized what a deserted place it must be, and I wondered what we would do if you didn't happen to be here on time."

"The hull camp was worryin' fur fear I *wouldn't* git here," admitted the man. "An' Hank Crowe wanted to send another man with me, but I knew he couldn't well spare one. I said to him I calkilated a woman that would come out to this place, an' leave her baby an' all, would git up spunk enough to help me with the stretcher."

His kind glance met hers and seemed to applaud her as they stumbled over the uneven ground with their light load.

"But is there no man at all at San Miguel's?" she asked.

"None to speak of," said the other.

They had reached the wagon with its covering of white canvas, and Sandy Rich slipped the stretcher adroitly in its place. He went back for the trunks and hampers which had been thrown off, while the woman gave her attention to the invalid.

"Air you goin' to set inside?" he asked, "or will you git up on the driver's seat with me? I put in a foldin'-chair so's you could stay inside if you wanted."

Claudia Judic looked questioningly at her husband.

"I'm feeling very well," he whispered, still with the air of guarding that unspeakably precious thing. "Sit outside, Claudia."

"You see," said Rich, under his breath, as they walked around to the front of the wagon together, "there *is* another man here. He's the agent of the station yon, and he does the telegraphing. But it wouldn't do for Mr. Judic to see him! He's a scarecrow—come out here six months ago much in the same way Mr. Judic is now. He's doing fine, but it wouldn't have done to have him carryin' that stretcher. It would 'a' scared Mr. Judic outright at the start. I went to him and said, 'Hull, don't you so much as stick your head out of the door.'"

"Poor fellow!" said the woman.

"Who? Hull? Oh, he's all right. Hull ain't the sort that frets about a missin' lung or two. There he is now!"

Claudia looked over where the dark-red station-house squatted in a patch of green, which lay like an emerald in the dull gold of the desert. A slender young man stood at the side waving a handkerchief.

"Does he want something?" she asked.

"Hull? No. That's his way of sayin' 'good luck.'"

"Oh!" said Claudia Judic. She snatched her own handkerchief from her belt and fluttered the white signal. The desert, which a moment before had seemed limitless and alien, already showed signs of neighborliness.

They had been talking almost in whispers, but now she spoke aloud.

"I've just given him his milk and his stimulants," she said, looking back in the wagon from the seat to which she had with some difficulty attained, and speaking as women do in hours of wifely anxiety, as if there were but one being in the world entitled to the masculine pronoun. "For half an hour, at least, I think he will be safe. It takes us a very long time to reach the Camp, I suppose?"

Rich said nothing for a second or two. He gathered the reins in his hands and chirruped low to his animals. Sixteen stanch legs stretched forth in unison, and with a curious, soft, steady movement the wagon began to whirl along the desert. Claudia Judic thought she had never experienced a more delightful motion.

"They're as smooth as silk, them mules," said Rich, referring to the locomotive qualities of the excellent beasts and not to their mottled skins of cream and tan. "And though it is a good way to Camp, we'll git there as safe an' as quick as the critters ken git us."

"Well," said Claudia, in a tone of resignation, "it seems as if things were going to come out right. I can't help feeling it. And, anyway, I've done all I could."

"Yes'm," said Rich, with conviction, "I'll bet you have."

From time to time he stole a glance at the woman by his side. She was a small creature with a delicate face, sweetly featured and tinted. Her eyes were a soft brown; the brows above them were rather highly arched, and the lashes long. Her ears were pink and small; her brown hair, touched with gold, curled

about her ears and waved on her brow in filmy bannerets. She sat soldier-straight, but she was full of impulsive and graceful motions, and when she turned—as she did every moment or two —to look at the prone figure within the wagon, there was something so protecting and efficient in her look and gesture that Rich felt if "anything happened" she would meet it with courage. He had been warned that something might happen. At the Camp they were under the impression that he had gone out to meet a dying man. James Judic was the cousin of Henry Crowe, owner and promoter of Crowe's Mine, and of the cyanide plant which made marketable its economical product, and Crowe had offered the sick man his last chance for life in extending to him the hospitality of the desert.

Every half-hour the mules were reined in while the sick man was given food and stimulants. He seldom spoke, and his eyes had that lonely and forbidding look which comes to those who stand at the beginning of the Long Trail. His wife spoke to him as if he were a child. She used a tone of command, for all her tenderness. She was the directress of his destiny, and unconsciously she suited voice and action to the part.

Claudia was almost childishly amused at the "dancers," and when she came to two that stood apparently with lifted skirts, toes pointed high and arms poised above the head, she laughed outright.

"I believe it does me good to laugh," she said, piteously, clasping and unclasping her hands. "I never would have dared to do it if the place weren't so large. There's no use in keeping shut up in your trouble in such a big place as this!"

She took in the vast wild, the arching heavens, the flight of a proud eagle, with her sad and gentle eyes.

"No use on yearth!" agreed Mr. Rich. "I say nothin' was ever any better for pullin' a long face over it. We may as well whoop it up while we're on this yearth below." He said it with a twang that seemed to give it a Scriptural turn.

The wind blowing over the desert was cool and refreshing. The gray-green flora of the waste mitigated the expanse of sand, and here and there a few piñons cluttered, or a patch of alfileria grew. The distance was lilac, the sky a cloudless sapphire.

"It doesn't look so terrible," said Claudia Judic. "I had always thought the desert would be very terrible."

"It gits riled," said Rich. "But I never saw none so ugly they was riled all the time."

Mrs. Judic laughed lightly.

"That's true enough," she said, and settled her feet on the dashboard. She was ready, evidently, to accept both the comforts and the philosophy of the place. She had left behind her the freshly weaned babe of her love and all the friends of her native town; left behind the snug home-life, the ease which had always been hers. She had set out to race and to struggle with Death, and she was nerved to the contest. She had no thought and no hope that did not relate to it.

"It's a pity," said Rich, as they ate together from the lunch-basket he had spread between them on the high seat, "that you couldn't 'a' brought your baby. Hank Crowe was tellin' me how you had to leave it behind. I said to him I thought that was mighty tough."

"Oh," said Mrs. Judic, with a catch in her throat, "I *couldn't* bring him. He was just six months old the very day the doctor told me that if I wanted to keep Mr. Judic alive I'd have to take him to another climate. You see, Mr. Judic couldn't go alone. He depends on

me so. About one-tenth of him is body and all the rest is spirit, you may say. The doctor—old Doctor Reynolds that we've always had—said if I sent him off alone he was as good as doomed. I had to hold James in my arms a good part of the way here. His vitality was so low I was afraid he might—might go, and I not know it. You see, I simply couldn't bring the baby."

She looked at the man with an expression at once wistful and defensive.

"Oh pshaw, no!" he cried. "What could you 'a' done with a baby?"

"I just gave him over to Mother Judic," said she. "Mother has such a nice little home, with a beautiful yard and all. And all the neighbors are interested in Jamie. He's a very healthy baby, and he's quick to make friends—holds out his hands to every one and is forever laughing. His hair is the brightest yellow I ever saw. You'd think it was spun gold if you were to see it in the sun, and there's a dimple at every finger and one at each knee and elbow,—besides, of course, those in his cheeks."

"Must be as full of holes as a sieve," laughed Rich, rather huskily.

"You never had a baby, I suppose, Mr. Rich?"

"Who? Me? Oh, thunder! yes, I've had a kid. Dead, though. Mother dead too. His mother was part Mojave—part Indian, you know. But she was a good woman. And the kid—he was all right too. We had a smallpox summer here once and—"

"I see," said Claudia Judic, softly. "And your boy—how old was he?"

"Why, he was three. He was mighty cute, too,—used to pretend help me hitch up, and 'd ride with me everywhere. I was doin' haulin' for the old Bonaventure mine then. I just quit and come away after he was gone. It was too all-fired lonesome; I couldn't stand it."

"No," said the woman, softly. They drove on for some time in silence, each absorbed in his own thoughts. The breathing of the sick man came to them heavily.

"It's a long way yet, I suppose," said Mrs. Judic.

"Oh, not so far," heartened the other, and whipped his mules into a faster run. The woman's small hands were clasped in her lap, and Rich could see that her whole being was at a tension. She was listening, body and soul, to that labored breathing. She had asked her husband a dozen times if he wanted her to hold his head or sit by him, but he had more

air, he said, if he had the whole space to himself. There was air enough, surely—air sweeping out of the lilac distance, quivering visibly on the horizon, tossing the finer sand in soft hillocks. From time to time Mrs. Judic gave her husband whiskey and water from a flask, but betweentimes she used all of her self-control to feign indifference. It annoyed him, she feared, to be the constant subject of attentions.

At twilight they reached the Camp. It was a group of tents set in the sand. A cold and beautiful spring bubbled up out of the ground and trickled away in a small rivulet. In the shadow of the Fortress, as the rock was called, stood the cyanide plant, with its fresh pine sides—an ungainly edifice.

There was a new tent set apart among a group of piñons, with its door opening to the expanse of the desert. Rich pointed it out.

"That's your home, ma'am," he said. "No front steps to scrub, you see." He did not drive up to the tent, but kept on the road and stopped before a hitching-post.

"I ain't goin' to cut your yard all up," he explained.

Their approach had been silent, and

the men, who were at supper in the eating-tent, had not heard their arrival.

"The dogs usually let folk know when there's anything doin'," said Rich, "but this time we've fooled them."

In the dim interior of the wagon they could make out the sick man lying motionless. His eyes were closed, his breath feeble, his hands shut in a curious grip.

Rich started back from the wagon, but Mrs. Judic gave a reassuring whisper.

"He's just holding on to himself," she said. "Let them know he's here, and tell them to bring something hot —coffee or soup."

A moment later the men came pouring out of the eating-tent. They were silent, having evidently been warned against a commotion. At their head walked Henry Crowe, Judic's cousin. He strode up to Claudia, looking gigantic in the twilight, and grasped her hand in awkward congratulation.

"Well, you got here!" he said, significantly.

He had made the Judics' tent comfortable in soldier fashion, with two cots covered with gray blankets, a table, some folding-stools, a stove, and a wash-stand. He and Rich carried in the sick man. The Chinese cook came running along in

the windy dusk bearing a tray of hot food, and Claudia threw off her hat to make ready to feed her husband. At the end of an hour he was sleeping comfortably. Then she stood up and wiped the perspiration from her face.

"Come," Crowe whispered. "Come over and get something to eat. One of the men will look after James."

She obeyed without a word, and Crowe sent one of the men to keep watch till her return.

"Well," said Henry Crowe, suiting his pace to hers as they crossed the camp-yard, "I like your way of doing things, Claudia. If James lives, I guess he'll know where to put the blame. I always knew you had sentiment, but I wasn't so sure you had sense. I thought perhaps you were too sweet to have any sense."

His cousin's wife looked up wanly.

"Oh, Henry," she laughed, "how queer it sounds to have any one talking about me! I've almost forgotten that I existed. It's been so horrible about James, and it was such torture for his mother to part with him, and every one has been so wondering how the baby would get on and if it would live, that I've ceased to have any life except through these others."

Crowe seated her at the table and waited on her, even cutting the bread from the loaf.

"That's all right, too," he said, heartily. "You've been living, Claudia! Some of us couldn't care that much about any one if we wanted to, and if we did care we'd never know how to think of anybody but ourselves."

As Claudia Judic ate the coarse food of the camp, washing the meal down with the hot, grateful tea, she thought of her cousin's words. Perhaps this labor, this consuming anxiety, this utter submergence of self, *was* life. Maybe it was a privilege—this responsibility, this midnight flow of tears, this relinquishment of delight! She fell to thinking of her wedding romance, of the days of joy and service and of pleasant neighborly offices and domestic tasks, of her first home-keeping and all the pleasures of that placid, useful, wholesome time. Then came the revelation of Jamie, the child of her heart, and, suddenly, as his father and herself worked and loved and planned together, brooding over the child, building for it, and nurtured with the sweet food of content, James had been stricken down. Had he been a heartier man, the physician said, he would have

died. As it was, he hung somewhere between life and death, and fared forth neither way. Then came the period of horrible waiting, while the soul and the mind of the sick man grew torpid, while all planning and initiative devolved upon her, so unexperienced and untrained, and their small store dwindled, and the dread of want overtook them.

She looked up suddenly, remembering where she was. Not far from her, in a corner, her cousin sat smoking his pipe. Six feet and two inches in height, with his sand-colored khaki, yellow leggings, and his sun-bleached hair, he was typical of the West of which Claudia had dreamed—dreaming not so much with anticipation as with dread.

"You'll sleep well to-night," said her cousin, "and in the morning we'll talk things over. I don't say James's prospects are bright, but I say he has a fighting chance! As for you—"

Claudia Judic held up a fragile hand on which glittered her diamond engagement-ring, and the plain gold band that James Judic had placed on that slender finger on a yet more significant occasion.

"Don't speak of me!" she cried, with a kind of gayety. "I—I think I'd rather talk of anything else."

They went out-of-doors together and paced up and down the sands, talking of their friends and neighbors back in Craven, Iowa. Crowe wanted to say something about the baby, but she avoided that subject, and turned him from it whenever he approached it. So, after a time, he left her at her tent. He paced up and down at a distance for a while, watching her as she made preparations to care for the sick man during the night. She had not asked to have any one near her, had expressed no fear of the black waste without her door, had not even so much as inquired if there were wild animals or prowling Indians. There were both, in fact, but the men at Camp Crowe took their chances even as men in the city take theirs, with the expectation that disaster will come to other men, but not to themselves. After a while she let down the flap of her tent. She was ready for the night—the night which would bring her little refreshment and many interruptions.

And when, the next morning, she came early from her tent, hollow-eyed, but smiling, and went to breakfast with the rest, she was accepted as part and parcel of Camp Crowe. The men accepted her, liked her pluck, her reserve, the coura-

geous cheerfulness of her voice. The desert accepted her, and tanned her delicate skin and took the brilliant gloss from her hair, nourished her limbs and strengthened her spirit. The day and night accepted her and gave her work and rest. She worked more hours than any man in the Camp, but she had a power of recuperation that none of the rest had. While they plodded along the sand, she tripped; when they gloomed, she laughed. It was not a laugh which sprang from gayety, for there was nothing to inspire that. It was the maternal laugh—the laugh the brave spirit makes to hearten those about it. And from the first she assumed maternal responsibilities in the Camp. She began by looking after her husband's cousin, but presently she was looking after every one—even Li Chung, the Chinese cook.

For the first two months her husband's destiny hung in doubt. It was a gambling crowd at Crowe's Camp, but no one was taking chances on James Judic's life. Then, almost in a day it seemed, he began to walk up and down outside his tent in the morning sun, and to wonder what the mail would bring, and to laugh at the songs the men sang. After this his improvement was rapid, and presently

he was given small tasks to do about the camp, and Henry Crowe consulted him on business. He had a head for business, and his practical training in a bank made it easy for him to assume the responsibilities of the bookkeeping and the correspondence for the Crowe Mining Company.

At the end of six months he began to feel himself established there, in a way. He was still far from strong, and it was impossible for him to make even moderate excursions. But he was comfortable; he slept and ate well, and his spirits were good. He began to develop a taste for the life, and left Claudia much alone while he sat with the men, listening to their stories or their songs, or taking a hand with them at poker.

Something curious had befallen James Judic in that strange twilight of existence when he hung between life and death. His soul had somehow divested itself of conscientiousness, and he had shuffled off responsibility. He fell into the way of living for the hour, of avoiding thought of the future, and it was evident that he regarded the past as a time of heavy burdens. He seldom referred to it, seldom spoke of his mother or his child. He seemed, in the revival

of animal life that had come to him, to find sufficient satisfaction in the mere facts of sun, wind, sleep, food, laughter, and converse. He had preserved that unspeakably precious thing which he had clutched with eager hands. It was his. He lived. To-day was to-day; all that went before was with yesterday's seven thousand years, and to-morrow was an unknown quantity.

Claudia had begun to take up other tasks. She went into the kitchen at least once a day to direct the cooking, and she often prepared dishes with her own hands, transforming the table by these ministrations. She kept Henry Crowe's tent in a condition of exquisite cleanliness, and if any of the men required to have a needle used they came to her, sure of gracious service. She was a practical and an honest woman, and she gave these offices in reciprocity for the hospitality which she received—hospitality for which she could make no other return. James paid his way by his bookkeeping—paid it and more,—and after a time Crowe recognized this fact and gave him a stated stipend. How much it was Claudia did not know, for she never saw any of it.

It is wonderful how Time can cheat

the unwary. In this little sequestered community, where each day was like the last, where no events of importance disturbed the trivial usualness, the weeks and the months slipped by like beads on a string. The gray djinn of the waste are wizards and mesmerize the soul. At least every one seemed sordidly content, though the mine gave small profits, and nothing occurred to justify the sacrifice represented by this isolation.

There was but one member of the party who was actively discontented, and that was the one who habitually spoke words of content. Claudia Judic, as has been said, had no thought at first but to spend herself for her husband. She was consumed with the desire to see him well. It was as if she hung over a pit, holding him from the abyss with her fragile arms. But when she had lifted him, when he stood at the rim—though, perchance, somewhat too near the sheer dark edge — her generic maternity recurred to something more specific. She began to remember the babe she had left thousands of miles behind. Not but that she had always remembered him in a sense. A child is always in a mother's mind, furnishing the substructure of thought and feeling. Or, to speak with

clearer simile, the voice of the child is forever audible to the mother; it is the fundamental, ever-present harmony, and as the diapason of the sea lies behind the other harmonies of nature, making the voices of the wind, the cries of men, birds, and trees but accessories, so the sounds of the world relate themselves to the voice of the child in the heart's-ear of the mother. This consciousness had always been Claudia's. But now more definite longing came to her. She was ready for her babe, and therefore her being cried out for him. Nor was it alone her spirit that made this demand, nor yet merely that she might learn how he had grown in thought, what words came to his lips, what expectations and fears looked out of his heaven-blue eyes. It was these things, truly, but it was much more. Her whole body desired him. The passion of the lover for his mistress is a little thing compared to this maternal hunger. Her arms ached, literally, to clasp him, her shoulders ached to bear his weight, her feet ached to run in his service; her eyes were hot for want of beholding him. At night she dreamed she felt him tugging at her long hair, or nestling his satin-soft and dimpled hand in her bosom.

She did not dare to speak. More than ever James needed her. His health would have deserted him with his first week's residence in a less arid climate, and there were other than physical reasons why she now felt she must remain with him. She set herself against the atmosphere of the camp, contriving this thing and that to keep her husband with her after work-hours, and pouring her love upon him like a libation. She gave so freely that she did not realize that she was giving, and neither, indeed, did James. He took her devotion as he did the sunshine, not analyzing the cause of his elasticity of heart, nor, perhaps, understanding it. It is not the way with most men to notice the presence of happiness, but only the absence of it.

"It's a free life," he would say to his wife. "I never dreamed, Claudia, till we came here, how free life could be. I wouldn't go back to the conventionalities and restraints for anything that could be given me. Oh, if I had my health, of course, it might be different! But as it is, this is the life for me."

It never seemed to occur to him that *she* wanted to go back. And she knew there was not enough money with which to pay for that long journey. They were all but

penniless. Such small investment as they had—and it was only a few hundred dollars—Claudia had placed at the disposal of her mother-in-law to use for the child. She was much too proud to ask her husband's cousin for any money, and, indeed, he had hard enough work at times to pay off his men and purchase the supplies.

It was not oftener than once a fortnight that the wagon was sent for the mail. Then it went the forty miles to San Miguel and ten miles beyond, following along the railroad to the town of Santa Cerro, where there was a supply-store as well as a post-office. The hour of return was always uncertain. The men were sent turn and turn about, that they might have the taste of the pleasures of the town, and if these proved particularly enticing, the return of the wagon might be delayed a good many hours, sometimes even a day or two. Such dereliction as this met with general disapprobation, it is true, but it was looked upon in the light of an accident, which the man who had lapsed from the path of rectitude and punctuality regarded with almost as much regret as did his fellow campers.

Mail-days became active torture to

Claudia Judic. She would await with tense expectation the appearance upon the horizon of the dusty "schooner" drawn by its four "clay-bank" mules. Fortunately her tent stood farthest desertward, and sitting at her door she could see for five miles down the level floor of the mesa. Certain days she could see even farther. She had a remarkable sight, and the desert life sharpened it. She could pick out a bird that others could not see, could catch its wings glinting in the sun in the burning sapphire; note the distant movements of the prairie-dogs and catch the flick of the rabbit's tail when none but herself could detect them. Sometimes for hours she sat with her eyes focussed on the most distant visible part of the dusty mesa. But the most terrible moment of all, perhaps, was when the wagon was entering camp. She was suspicious if the driver chanced to withhold his gaze from her, imagining that he had no letter and was loath to confess it; if he signalled her with his glance, she was equally certain it was from pity, and that he had come letterless. She felt like shrieking with impatience while she stood among the others, commanding her face to impassivity, till the letters were handed round.

It was taken for granted that nothing was to be done by any one till that ceremony was over. Men were excused from their work, meals stood uneaten, everything waited for this event.

A yet more poignant instant came when the letter was actually in her hand. She could not bring herself to read it before the others, and often she could hardly summon the strength to walk away with it to her tent. Then, alone, she hesitated to tear it open, and would compel herself to the nice use of her penknife, opening the letter properly. At the first reading she could understand nothing. Her eyes would eat up the words, which conveyed no meaning to her. All was as confused as if it had been written in a foreign tongue. But she would discipline herself to patience and to perception, and slowly, word by word, like a child learning to read, she would follow her mother-in-law's small, neat chirography through the closely written pages.

Usually the letters were filled with anecdotes of Jamie—he had teeth like grains of rice; he was running around the yard alone; he was talking, and there would be an attempt to reproduce his speeches. Now he had had some esca-

pade, now some unusual pleasure; or he was indisposed with a cold, or he had a new Sunday frock, or his grandmother had bought him some toys. The reports were minute and merciful. Across the jealousy which a woman feels for a son's wife the mother-bond spanned, making the old mother compassionate to the young one. She actually refrained from telling all the child's loveliness and cleverness lest she should cause unnecessary torture. She tried to think of ways in which Claudia could contrive to come back for a visit; she apologized for not being able, physically or financially, to bring the child out to Camp Crowe.

It was in the second year that Claudia began to lay a plan. She had accustomed herself to the idea that if her husband was to live at all he must stay where he was. He was making himself useful, and his income was now of some account. Claudia began to ask him for a little each week, and this she scrupulously put away. She was nest-building, and once the idea seized her, it became an absorbing passion.

"I want a house, Henry," she said one night to her husband's cousin.

They were walking, as they often did, up and down, on the soft earth, in the

wild wonder of the sunset. It turned their very faces into gold, tinged their sun-faded hair with glory, and lighted their eyes with a sort of over-beauty. Their clothes no longer appeared worn and work-stained, but garments splendid. When they spoke simple words, it was as those who can afford to use plain language, because of some argent richness of thought lying behind the words. About them was vastness; and their isolation became at such moments not pitiable, but proud. They seemed allied to historic desert-dwellers, and they felt sure of the possession of the virtues which have made such dignified among men—the virtues of hospitality, of courage, of tribal faith. This night the glow was paler than it sometimes was, and they spoke softly, and of home things, Claudia following with idle gaze a humming-bird that nested in the branching cactus, unafraid of harm.

"You should have had a house long ago," said Crowe, "only I had a fear that you might think we were trying to tie you down here. Neither James nor I wish to do that, of course."

"Destiny has made this my home," she said, gravely. "It is here that I live." There was no sadness in the tone.

The soft vibrations of the voice seemed tinged with a gentle pride.

"I would have built a house for myself," continued her companion, "only I've always liked that little bunch of tents. It reminds me of a Bible picture I used to look at when I was a little fellow. Probably the picture was all wrong, and that tents of that particular sort had nothing to do with the case; but, anyway, it's in my mind and won't get out. The mules have been a real cross to me. I always wanted camels and some date-palms."

Claudia gave a gurgling, birdlike laugh.

"I know," she said; "but, dear me! you never *can* have camels. And you can't make a tent-woman out of me. I'm not that kind, you see."

"No," admitted Crowe, looking at her, "you aren't."

She had never lost her look of fragility, of gentleness. She was essentially domestic, Her smile was made to welcome one at the threshold. Her voice was for sheltered rooms. It suited itself to the hearth, the cradle, and the family table. The wild might be all about her, but she remained a tame thing, a creature of roof and fire, of songs and dreams, of the quiet arts, of housed loves.

So the men were set to work to put her up an adobe. It was in two parts, with a patio between, and in the patio she swung hammocks and set certain potted vines—things not of that environment. One room was for sleeping. It was bare and clean and comfortable, with the air blowing in from every side, if the occupants so willed.

The other room was for living—for it was still Crowe's idea to have his cousins eat at the general table, that being economy both of food and service. This second room Claudia decorated with the conventionalized leaf of the yucca splashed in dull red upon the walls. She had, among the things she had brought from home with her, a roll of dark-red Indian cotton flecked with peacock's feathers, and of this she made draperies and a couch-cover. James's invalid-chair and her own rocker, brought over from Santa Cerro, stood beside the reading-table, and there were a few books and twenty photographs of Jamie. The floor of pounded earth was made gay with Indian rugs, and baskets, both for use and ornament, played a conspicuous part in the furnishing. A well-tended olla stood in the shadiest corner, and a flowering Mexican shawl flaunted itself — a

piece of flamboyant tapestry—from the wall. It was rather a gay little apartment, and when its mistress was in it her qualities of femininity seemed to become accentuated.

"I would know it was your room, Claudia," said Henry Crowe, "if I stumbled in it without a notion that you were this side of the Rockies."

It seemed to speak of home and old association to Judic, too, and he was in it a good deal more than might have been expected. He and Crowe got in the way of playing chess together, and Claudia sewed or watched them.

But this room, sociable as it was, could not be said to be her favorite. She liked better the night-room—the room where she slept. For sleep had come to be the doorway to an enchanted castle of Heart's Desire. There baby kisses were ready at hand to warm a mother's starved lips; baby hands tugged at one's skirts; a baby voice shattered the great bubble of silence. Sometimes, even, warm, down-soft baby fingers cuddled in one's palm. And when dawn came, overbright, awaking one to the bald facts of life, there was—well, anything but that which came in dreams.

By common consent the group of

piñon-trees near Mrs. Judic's adobe was considered as her private garden, though no wall surrounded it save the blue horizon, and no flowers grew there except those of the fancy. But the scrub-pines made a sort of screen, so low did their branches grow upon the trunks; and the point of honor, which was to avoid scrutinizing Mrs. Judic when she retired to this spot, gave it a privacy which walls might not have secured. It had from the first been Claudia's custom to spend much time there, but when for several days she came to haunt the spot, the men grew curious. And at last Sandy Rich played the Peeping Tom. Mrs. Judic had gone for a canter, and when her white mare and blue frock were splotches of color on the mesa, Sandy, ventured into the "garden." What he saw made him worried for a moment about Mrs. Judic's sanity. For there were little shelves fitted in between the trees, with low benches before them, and on the shelves were bits of broken china, glittering pieces of quartz, mica chips, a foolish array of shards and scraps such as a child might gather. Sandy, heavy-jawed and wide-eyed, stood staring. He thought hard and long, and by degrees an idea dawned.

"It's the kid!" he decided. "She's plannin' to git the kid out."

He told first one and then another of the men, till all the camp knew. It needed this explanation, perhaps, to account for the change that was coming over her. Something half coquettish or expectant, something sweetly and timorously gay, showed itself in her manner and her looks. She was laying aside the old frocks which she had worn till they were almost in rags, and was appearing in new clothes, made by her own hands, and girded with scarlet or blue. She donned little cloth caps of the same colors, and she had the appearance when she came from her tent of having a new toilet. The sum represented in these purchases was a minute one, but forethought had been given, that was evident. James Judic happened to mention, casually, that his wife was sending back a red tam-o'-shanter because she didn't like the shade.

It may have been about this time that he began to notice that he had lost his abject servitor. He no longer required close service, it is true, but his sick vanity had got into the way of expecting it. His wife, however, appeared to have too many matters in hand to spend her time

in watching or anticipating his moods. She was continually occupied with something, as he noticed with an irritation of which he felt ashamed and for which he could not account. She was riding, or housekeeping, or sewing, or touching with fingers reminiscent of old days the zither which Henry Crowe had bought for her on her last birthday. The music, soft as an æolian harp, crept into the air, spending itself like a slow wave. Under her fingers it was as soft and yearning as a woman's voice; and, indeed, the melodies took to themselves—or so it seemed to him who had given her the instrument—the accents of supplication. They appeared to woo and call and coax. Sandy Rich, striding up and down in the night, unseen and vaguely dreaming of things he could not voice, tormented, too, with a pain he did not understand, made out the meaning of all this.

"She's callin' the kid," he said, in his beard. "An', by gosh! if I was dead I believe I'd hear her—callin' like that!"

Presently it was known that Sandy's surmises had been correct, and that "the kid" was coming out in the care of a woman who lived at Towner, the next village to Craven, and that she was going on to Pasadena, and was to drop

little Jamie Judic off at San Miguel, where the train was to be slacked for the purpose. The day was set. He was coming; and it was considered good form for every one to make some reference to it when Mrs. Judic was around.

"I tell ye what," said Sandy, "you'll have to keep him clost to the house, Mis' Judic. You mustn't let him git around the blastin'."

"There's that colt of Nancy's," said Crowe, speaking of the flecked colt of the white mare. "By the time it's old enough to saddle, Jamie 'll be the right size to mount him."

"I cal'late we'll have to shet off Sandy's vile swearin' tongue," declared Judson Shafer, the overseer of the mill. "He ain't fit for no kid to be around."

Crowe decided to build himself a home; and after that had been built in the odd hours of the men, Shafer, the overseer, went in with two other men to put up a third residence. Camp Crowe began to lose its gipsy look—its appearance of being an overnight caravan.

Moreover, Claudia contrived a sundial, and she got Sandy Rich to build a spring-house. It was of rough rock, with seats by the side, and Sandy fretted out, crudely, in the stone, this doggerel:

Comfort give to great and least,
Wandering man and weary beast.

She sent for some pepper-tree saplings and willow cuttings, and set them out near the spring, where they took kindly to their environment.

But Claudia Judic, working, laughing, cajoling, was, after all, merely cheating time. Her hands were busy, but her eyes were, so to speak, on the clock. She was set to one tune, wound up for a certain hour, focussed to a coming event!

"I think," she said, gravely, to the men at supper one night, "that though it may seem foolish in me, I'd better start for the train the night before Jamie is expected. You see, starting at dawn is all very well ordinarily, and I know you've made it with the mules over and over again. Yet, if one of them should happen to fall lame or anything break about the wagon—" She broke off in horror at the thought.

"But where could you sleep?" asked Crowe, turning a deep gaze upon her. "You can't lie out in the desert, you know."

Claudia had a vision of the dark wonder of the pulsing sky, and the star of the Nativity above the place where the Babe lay.

"Oh, I should not at all mind lying out in the sand," she said. "And in the morning we could build a fire and make our coffee, and have Mr. Hull over to eat with us. I have always liked Mr. Hull so much!" She referred to the station agent who had signalled her good luck the day of her arrival.

So it was agreed. Sandy was to drive, and Judic and his wife were to go in the wagon, which was to be taken on to Santa Cerro for supplies, and then, returning to San Miguel, pick them up.

But from excitement or defect of will, James Judic fell ill, suddenly and acutely, and his wife could not leave him. She came to breakfast and told the men.

"I can't go," she said, in a voice they had never heard her use before. "Mr. Judic is very ill indeed. He'll be well by to-morrow or the next day if I nurse him properly, but I couldn't leave him. It's out of the question. You'll have to —to go alone, Mr. Rich."

A stormy silence spread around the table. Tornado seemed imminent, and Claudia quivered to it. She held the men steady with her brave, tortured eyes.

"Mr. Judic is terribly distressed about —about disappointing me," she said. "But he knows that Mr. Rich will take

good care of—of—" She could not utter another syllable. For the first time in their three years' experience with her she broke down. But she had a proud frankness about it. She put her hand first to her trembling lips and then to her eyes, and arose with dignity and made her way to the door.

Sandy Rich was off early. He started, indeed, a day in advance of the appointed time, but there was, of course, the marketing to do at Santa Cerro.

"Thunder and mud!" sighed Sandy, "but I'll bet them mules *do* go lame! I'll bet you two to one the darned wagon breaks! I'd ruther be chased by Injuns than go on this yere errand!"

"See you do it well," growled Judson Shafer. "If you come back here without that kid, you'll be lynched."

It was meant for a jest, but it sounded curiously unlike one. Sandy knew the eyes that watched from the adobe by the piñons, and as he flicked his sand-colored mules down the mesa, they seemed to be burning holes in his back—those eyes with their soft fires. He resisted the impulse to turn as long as he could. It seemed almost too familiar, too confidential, for him to respond to this

mystic and imperious message. But the force was too compelling. He turned and waved his hand. Something scarlet flashed back and forth in answer. It was the red cap—of the right shade—which Claudia Judic had got to please the critical, heaven-blue eyes of her son!

Work went badly at the blastings and worse at the mill. An air of uncertainty pervaded everything. Mrs. Judic was not at dinner nor at supper. The sound of her zither was not heard. An appalling and, it seemed, a presageful silence hung over her house. The night settled down, with purple sky and stars of burning beauty; the dawn was pellucid, with a whispering ground-wind. But still, at breakfast, she was not visible. The camp had fed and battened on her good cheer, but she hid herself in the hour of her fears. The gay mask was down, and she spared them the sight of the bared, truthful face.

The long day waned—the long, bland, golden, unemphasized day. It drew to its close, as all days have to, whether of agony or ecstasy. And on the mesa, a little bunch against the sky, appeared the familiar wagon.

"It's Sandy," said the men, drawing long breaths and lighting their pipes—for

supper was just over. "It's that fool Sandy." And they smoked silently, waiting in vicarious agony.

Had the train been smashed? Had the woman kidnapped the child? Had the child died on the way? These questions, crudely put and jokingly exchanged, represented the sympathy felt for that invisible woman in the adobe. They did not know that at their utmost they could encompass only a portion of her fears.

It came on along the mesa—the wagon came on. It was at first an exasperatingly small thing, but it grew. It attained its normal size. It drove into the camp yard. A glorious gold from the uttermost west enveloped the earth, and all things were visible by it, though beautified. They all saw Sandy there in the wagon, and saw him sitting — alone. The men were as statues—immovable as those hideous dancers back on the old trail—as Claudia Judic came out of the adobe and drifted like an ungraved ghost down the warm sands. She was dressed in white—none of them had ever seen her so dressed before—and she wore a little trailing vine in her hair.

The eyes they had known so patient had a different look in them now. They

held a consuming expectancy, a terrible impatience, a sort of divine torment. But there was only Sandy on the seat, busying himself with something back in the wagon, and for very mercy the men looked away.

What did she mean by coming on like that when she saw there was only Sandy? They were indignant. They wanted to shout to her to go back. Shafer tried to wave to her, but his arms fell powerless. She came on so swiftly, too! A miserable panic seized upon the men. They wanted to run.

Then, as they looked, as they flinched, as they inwardly cursed, up above the seat back rose a tousled head of gold, a pair of wondering eyes filled with baby-wisdom, a dew-damp face flushed from sleep, smiling yet tremulous!

Sandy leaned back and lent a hand.

"Up with you, old man!" he cried. "Here ye are, honey-heart, and here's yer ma!"

They saw her come on and reach up her slender arms. They saw the boy look at her with adorable timidity; saw her beaming beauty banish his fears, saw her gather him close and walk away with his head pillowed in her neck.

Sandy got down from the wagon seat

and stood on the shining earth in the glorified light. He began to unharness the mules, and three men came to assist him. Silence hung heavy sweet. But Sandy valorously broke it.

"I calkilate I don't git lynched," he said.

The Prophetess of the Land of No-Smoke

BY MARIE MANNING

OLD Chugg had brought the stage into town one afternoon on a rocking gallop that to the initiated signified some information of importance, and, without leaving the box, had given some advance news in pantomime. He had a passenger inside—an old man with a beard like a prophet, who later went about the vicious little town affixing signs to such resorts as apparently stood most grievously in need of reformation. The notices merely stated that a prayer-meeting would be held on No-Smoke prairie on the following Thursday, and that all would be welcome. But as Chugg's pantomime had consisted of elaborate manipulation of a phantom skirt, with sundry coquettish rollings of the eye and some clerical gesticulation, it had not taken the cognoscenti long to

discover that they might shortly expect a visit from the woman preacher.

Town had long heard of her—the fame of her preaching was broadcast. "When she left a settlement," Chugg had been kind enough to add, "you wondered if she had done it alone, or if she had had any seventeen-year locusts in to help her." So town had decided to respond to the invitation as a man—not that it felt itself as seriously in need of reformation as of amusement.

The fire and brimstone that had been hurled at it by the migratory preachers that came to No-Smoke at long intervals seldom failed to enliven the life of the range; and while no outward disrespect to the men of the jeremiads would have been permitted, their diatribes seldom failed to add to the common fund of innocent amusement. The men were willing to pay well for their entertainment, too, when the hat was passed, and, on the whole, they considered that matters between themselves and the casual shepherds that came to No-Smoke stood about even. And they would bid an outwardly chastened adieu to the parson and await the next camp happening—which might be vaudeville combined with the sale of patent medicine, some desperate

act demanding the swift, unrelenting justice of the plains; or another preacher with his tales of fire and brimstone. On the whole, the woman preacher promised more in the way of entertainment than her brothers in judgment. And one who knew them well would have scented mischief in the men's demureness as they rode forth from town as sedate as a company of pilgrims nearing a shrine.

Spring had come slowly this year in the Land of No-Smoke. Its name, which in the original tongue stood for its great loneliness—the place where no camp-fire nor the curling smoke of tepee intruded upon the silent councils of the hills,—had of late years lost its significance. The Indians had left the land to the sun and the silence and the evil spirits that, according to their traditions, dwelt there. But the big cattle outfits had no traditions, and when they saw that the land was good for grazing they brought many herds, and the silent spaces of No-Smoke fell into the ways that were strange to it. Town sprang into being overnight. The cracked tinkle of the dance-hall piano, the clinking of glasses and spurs, laughter loud if not always mirthful, pistol-shots, —for life there was essentially a thing to be played with,—all contributed their

sprightly chronicle, till at last the Land of No-Smoke became a byword for all that was unseemly. And the parsons on their way to towns of better repute hurled damnation at it and left it to its evil ways.

"I take it," said Tom Jarvis, who was in the lead of the string of horsemen winding their way over the old Indian trail in the direction of the prayer-meeting, "that we're nearing this yere spiritual round-up. The lady parson is even now heating her branding-irons in yonder tent. The herd"—he waved a comprehensive hand toward his companions—"will be druv to the back of the wagon, where the lady will brand it accordin' to taste. 'Rock of Ages' and the passin' of the hat—especially the passin' of the hat—will conclood the services."

Jarvis was undeniably good to look at; even men would admit it. His black, curly head easily topped the crowd that would collect at any of their foregathering-places in the hope of one of his inimitable stories. Jarvis was what was known about camp as "a tall liar," but his work was invariably artistic. His delicately aquiline profile hinted at Latin descent, and the sombrero tilted rakishly but the more closely suggested the resem-

blance to one of Velasquez's gentlemen. Yet Jarvis spoke the "English" of the range with perfect content, applied his knife to his food with more than a dilettante's skill, and abhorred what he would have called "dude manners." There was a cruel straightness to the lips when he laughed, and he laughed more with women than with men. It was said about town that he had a wife in Texas whom he had quarrelled with, but of this Jarvis had never spoken. He was still in the lead of the string of horsemen heading toward the prayer-meeting when Saunders spurred his pinto abreast of Jarvis's sorrel.

"The whole country seems to be takin' on about us, and now here's this preachin' woman." He spoke pettishly, as though the criticism of the community of which he was an unimportant integer were a personal affront.

Jarvis half turned in his saddle and regarded with frank amusement the chinless face with its round eyes and puffy cheeks.

"Yes," he said, with the keen enjoyment of a big boy making merry with a little one: "*The Platte Valley Lyre* in that last editorial allowed that the bark was on our manners a heap; said we had taken the cure for the water habit, till

the sight of a puddle set us barkin' like a caucus of black-and-tans."

"You don't say so!" said Saunders, perceptibly moved by this statement. "I'd just hate my folks to hear that."

The camp of the woman preacher was before them. The eternal flatness of the prairie was broken by the outline of a little white tent and a big uncovered wagon. A pair of lean horses close by were cropping the scant pasturage of early spring. These human appurtenances seemed small and as feebly inadequate to cope with the giant forces about them as a child's toys would have been. The old man who had affixed the notices of the prayer-meeting sat on one of the wagon shafts, sulkily whittling. His attitude toward the impending service seemed analogous to that of the compulsory host whose womenfolk have bullied him into giving a party. He contented himself with a churlish nod to the men and whittled as if whittling were the business of the day.

But with the appearance of Miriam the sanctimonious demureness of the congregation, which had not been put out of countenance in the least by the old man's lack of cordiality, now gave way to self-conscious shyness. She was so unlike the

drawings they had made of her on the walls of Magee's that the sudden revelation of their shortcomings as draughtsmen had the effect of turning the tables, so to speak, and scoring a joke against themselves. She had no real claims to actual beauty—which made the almost thrilling effect of her presence the more amazing. She looked her history. All the selflessness, the long battling against sordid conditions, all the medieval mysticism, were written in that face, in the gray eyes that might have seen visions, in the mouth that would be tender even in old age. She had the look of a young sibyl whose heart is wrung that she must speak the words of sorrowful human destinies.

The men made way for her reverently. Their awkward deference had in it a shade more of awe, perhaps, than even the most beautiful woman might have taken unquestioningly as the rightful tribute of a country where the woman-famine made itself insistent at every turn. Her glance swept the throng of faces crowded close about the wagon, then came back to Tom Jarvis. Perhaps it was his general bearing, so startlingly at variance with the rest of the group, that at first challenged her attention. His easy atti-

tude had in it something of flattery, something of curiosity, something of personal demand. The strained attention that characterized the rest of them was in the case of Jarvis conspicuously lacking. He was frankly interested in her, but not as a possible proselyte to any scheme of salvation that she might have up her sleeve, so to speak. Again she returned his glance, and the words already pressing at her lips took flight. Something there was that seemed to speed from those half-smiling eyes beneath the tilted sombrero and bring with it confusion. For the first time since she had received "the call" to speak to these people of the wilderness she was sensible of self, of an ignoble desire to acquit herself with distinction;—the serenity of the prophetess had given place to the self-consciousness of the woman.

"God! O God!" she called, and her voice was muffled as one who calls feebly in the anguish of a dream. But the sound broke the spell; the congregation was not called to wait longer for her preaching. Miriam spoke to them from the big open wagon in which she had journeyed. On the seat was the old man, her father, his hand in his prophet's beard, looking up at her—though he lost the magic of

her words in his wonder at her gift of speech. Her gaze was beyond them all—straight into the blue. The wide shining eyes gave glowing testimony of her abundant inspiration. After that first breaking of the spell the outflow of her sincerity bore her along with the force of a torrent. The grim lines relaxed in the men's faces; they looked up at her, a group of great, overgrown boys with some latent flash of the ingenuousness of childhood lighting up their russet, tanned faces.

"Our Heavenly Father," she prayed, "give me the power to speak Thy word as Thou wouldst have it spoken, lovingly and with mercy. Let these men feel through me, unworthy medium, that Thou art with them in this wilderness,—in this land of such great loneliness that savage peoples long ago called it by a name that means there is no home in all the land. And calling it thus, they left it to the suns and the snows and the silence that were here always. And if these men, in their desolation, sometimes try to forget that there are no good women and little children who are glad of their coming—if they try to forget these things—do not let them think that Thou judgest them without understanding. False

prophets have told them that Thy wrath burns as the summer sun on the desert sand, but tell them through me that it is not so. For Thy mercy, boundless as this wilderness, is with them always."

She stretched out her hands to them in quivering entreaty; the tears streamed down her face. The men were moved by them more than by the words she had spoken;—a woman had wept over them, a good woman. An inarticulate murmur ran through the group. They edged up closer to the wagon and listened like hounds with every sense abeyant.

Subconsciously she was aware of an influence drawing her gaze from the mountains, and the necessity for resisting it. Then in an unguarded moment her eyes wandered from the snows of the towering peaks to the group of faces before her, and her glance encountered the smiling eyes of Tom Jarvis. Tolerance, indulgence even, there were in that narrow look that told unmistakably he was not taking her seriously. Realizing this, there came an end to her inspiration. She was no longer the shepherdess of No-Smoke; she was only a woman who had done her best. She asked a blessing on their meeting and took refuge in the little white tent.

The men shook themselves like dogs that had been through deep water—all but Tom Jarvis, whose narrow eyes contracted, then he yawned. Some of the men began to talk to the old man on the wagon shaft. Miriam remained within the tent.

"Say!" said Softy Saunders, his fingers twirling a dirty dollar bill, "that was a heap fashionable sermon, but why don't they pass the hat?"

Jarvis smiled his narrow smile. "She's inside the tent looking up a deep one—the stovepipe hat that the old man wore when he run a faro-bank over in Tucson."

The men changed countenance; the fleeting boyish expression with which they had listened to her preaching gave place to their every-day reckless look. The haggard lines came back, and there was some unseemly laughter.

"Did you see this man deal faro over in Tucson?"

"I never see his own particular bunch of features hovering over a faro-table," Jarvis admitted, "but I ain't been out in this country for ten years without pickin' up the art of readin' brands some. See an old graybeard trailin' round the country with a likely-lookin' young gal, and I'll show you a coin round-up all right.

Sometimes it's singin' an' voyleen, sometimes it's faro, sometimes it's preachin', but you pay for it, no matter what's its alias."

"But if you ain't seen this identical old man and this identical gal dealin' faro, you got no call to run felonous brands on to 'em and turn 'em loose for contumely,"—Softy Saunders grew two inches,—"and by your leave I think you are a liar."

A dozen hands dragged them apart. The old man on the wagon shaft, talking ramblingly to whomever would listen, had heard no word of the dispute, but now burst into feeble cackles of senile laughter. "Let 'em scrap; let 'em scrap—ha, ha!—used to be a great scrapper myself; stopped it now, though. She"—he jerked his thumb toward the white tent—"she don't like it!" He continued to laugh feebly, looking at them from one to the other, his eyes deep in the mists of seventy odd years. "Used to do right smart o' odd jobs back home," and again the ghostly laughter. "Whitewashed Mis' Todd's fence and mended her chicken-coop all in one day—ha, ha! I tell you there was a livin' in it, but she"—and again the accusing thumb pointed toward the tent—"heard there warn't no min-

isters out here, and she would sell out an come. Said what was good enough for Matthew was good enough for us. House belonged to her; her mother left it that way; an' here we be 'most ready for the poorhouse."

Jarvis looked about with a triumphant smile. "Surely, uncle, you'll let me pass the hat among the boys?"

In a twinkling the mist rolled away from the dull eyes.

"If she don't catch us—you couldn't pass no hat—but you might give me any little thing." He looked apprehensively toward the tent. Jarvis sent his eyes up and drew his nose down, and grinned around the circle like a cow-punching Mephistopheles. Saunders had already dropped his dirty dollar in the clutching tentacles of the old man. He answered Jarvis's grimace with a wink. Several of the men followed and deposited coins or bills, according to their capacity for receiving and retaining sentimental impressions under adverse circumstances. The old man cackled feebly as he opened and shut his fist. His eyes had taken on new lustre; they glowed palely, like a candle burning behind a cobwebbed pane.

"Father! father!" The cry, full of dis-

tress, rang from the tent, and Miriam ran to the old man and opened his hand quickly, as if she were taking some hurtful spoil from a child. She turned to the men with eyes full of disappointment. "Didn't I say one word to your hearts?" She pointed to the hills against the skyline, blue on blue, till the long chain melted into the snow crests. "And I came all that way to speak to you, and this is your answer!" She crowded the money into Jarvis's hand so carelessly that some of the smaller coins rolled to the ground. "Father is old; he does not understand." With infinite tenderness she led him toward the tent; he was whimpering like a child. "Yes, yes," she soothed him, "I'll get your supper now, and you're to have the fresh eggs we got yesterday,—and I'll make the coffee strong and sweet."

"It looks mighty like the quenchers were on you, Jarvis," said one of the men, lounging up to the doubting Thomas as he tightened his cinch. Town was far away; the sun, a flaming ball, was dropping behind the western range like a round lantern caught afire.

Jarvis continued busy with his cinch, and when he looked up he seemed less sure of himself, less debonair.

"You're right. The quenchers are on me if any one will drink with such a hound!" He flung a leg across the sorrel, and soon was one with the shadows of the foot-hills. At the fork of the road they turned to look back. Miriam had come from the white tent and begun to gather dry sage-brush for the evening fire. They watched her crouching, moving figure, now silhouetted against the red, now lost in the shadows, as she went and came among the dry stalks of last year's rank abundance. The line of the head, the meek profile, the round throat melting into the simply gathered bodice, were all so many arguments in her favor. The eloquence of Demosthenes would not have prevailed against the solitary figure going about her homely task on the lonely prairie.

They went back to town, and not a man among them could have told what it was that had befallen him and robbed his pipe of its savor or Mr. Magee's saloon of its accustomed sorcery. They talked it over far into the night, and decided — with perhaps not more than ninety-five per cent. of self-deception — that what really ailed them was the desire of a firm purpose of amendment. They cast about for a convincingly

oblique argument to detain the woman preacher among them, and a coveted salvation seemed to meet the greatest number of artistic requirements. While it was yet early morning a committee was in its saddles, flogging in the direction of No-Smoke to present a petition for a daily prayer-meeting for one week. They did not make a second mistake of offering pecuniary inducement,—but might they not bring a little game to the camp, as the country was fairly running over with things that needed killing? This to the old man, who at the suggestion seemed to strike off a spark or two of cordiality from his generally flinty demeanor.

But the prophetess would not commit herself. She had a journey to make to the north, and—her manner was gently deprecatory—she was not sure that the Lord had need of her work in the Land of No-Smoke. At which ensued such sanctimonious protestations, such crescendos and decrescendos of sighing, such rolling up of eyes and dropping of mouth corners, that had these bronzed men been in anything but a frame of mind utterly unnatural they would have been the first to laugh at themselves. The prophetess told them that

she would pray for light, and if it should be made manifest that it was the will of the Master, she would stay and pray with them daily for a week. They thanked her and returned to town. And the miracle of it was that no one laughed, not even when they were out of earshot from her, nor yet when they had dismounted at Magee's — dismounted there merely for the sake of habit. Trade was falling off, and the saloonkeeper, after a morning of unprecedented leisure, poured himself a solitary draught of consolation, and wondered what the town was coming to.

Jarvis joined them. He had not been one of the committee to go to No-Smoke prairie to plead with the prophetess for the prayer-meetings. Unlike the rest of them, he had not mislaid his sense of humor.

"Pass the sugar for the green-gooseberry tarts, Willy," the facetious Jarvis called to an imaginary attendant, waving his hand toward the soured-looking converts, who seemed devoid of inspiration or occupation till such time as they should return to the camp of the prophetess to hear of her decision. "Of course the lady's goin' to pull her righteous freight. A blind mule could see that

you are converted straight through to the other side. 'Othello's occupation's gone,' as the gent remarked in the Cheyenne opera-house after he'd done strangling his wife." And the newly regenerate were forced to admit that the chances of further spiritual aid seemed against them.

"I move," continued Jarvis, tilting his sombrero till the white line above the tan on his forehead showed, "that this yere outfit regards me as its forlorn hope. I ain't as yet found grace, and if this here lady soul-sharp can be induced to stop over, it will be because she's convinced that I shorely am in need of it. I therefore move that I act as a committee of one lost sheep, flocks out to her camp, alone, and states the case. The chances are that she'll rather enjoy plucking me as a brand from the burning." They had to admit the plausibility of this argument. Jarvis it was who had refused to take her seriously. Jarvis presenting himself as a proselyte would not be without weight on his side of the argument. They heartily urged on him the rôle of envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to the prophetess; but when he left town, some half-hour later, on his self-imposed errand of diplomacy, they were conscious of a just indignation in

seeing that he wore a pair of new overalls, and that the red silk handkerchief that sagged gracefully from his bronzed throat was the one reserved for state occasions.

The great plain of No-Smoke seemed to yearn in its utter loneliness. On three sides the hills girt it about, and from it the pale spring sunshine, like some golden vintage pouring from a broken cup, streamed down to the great stark desert beyond, that still slept the dreamless sleep of frost-bound desolation. In the uplands the wine of spring had begun to flush into life all winter-numbed things. The wind had the note of the mating bird as it sang in the bare branches of the cottonwoods, already feathery of outline; the tiny cactus leaves were shooting up from last year's shrivelled stumps, their thorns yet as harmless as the claws of a week-old kitten; the creek, full, deep-voiced, sang lustily of abundance. It gave plenty or it gave famine, as it brawled to the struggling ranch-lands below. In the spring there was human destiny in its singing. The first faint earthy smell mingled with the spice of the pines, and Jarvis breathed deeply of its fragrance.

Though the few pitiful household ef-

fects of the old man and his daughter were already packed and corded for the onward move—the call to remain not having been made clear to Miriam—she saw in the return of this solitary scoffer a manifestation that left no room to doubt the trend of duty. He had presented himself shorn of all prankishness. There was no mockery in the eyes that met hers, no trace of any cynicism in the voice that asked for help.

"Could I give it you, my brother," and again the quivering appeal of those big, kindly hands, that looked capable of so full a measure of tenderness, "could I give you the grace to see His mercy,—then indeed I would stay. But if this need of yours be to make a mock of me, to give my brothers cause for jest and laughter, then it were better that I go to those who have real need of my poor ministering." There was no anger in her voice, nor any hint of wounded pride at his failure to take her preaching seriously; but only a gentle setting forth of things expedient.

Jarvis bent his head. "It's true, lady, I grinned last night like a wolf; but don't you know that a man 'll grin when the truth bites at his heart—grin to hide the hurt, that he may not cry like a baby.

Again his eyes sought hers and held them captive; she wrestled blindly with the strange force in her heart, with the alien presence that had crept in like a thief in the night and laid rough hands on treasure that had seemed so secure. She turned toward the hills—serene in their strength. And all unconsciously she thought her prayer aloud: "Lord, is it I who am about to betray Thee?—To do Thy will—or my will?"

Jarvis fell back. "I'm only a black sheep," he said, "not worth saving. Them Injuns you spoke of are better worth while." The deceptive humility of the man, born of a sudden revelation of her character, carried the day. A little later he won his point and—practically—the woman; but for the moment he had been sincere.

She gently dismissed him when his errand was done, and no pretext that his nimble wits could devise could shake her resolution. But when he had gone she watched horse and rider as they climbed and dipped the trail, watched them till they were one with the blur of the skyline melting into the blue. Then she went far away from the camp, and throwing herself face downward on the earth, she prayed the frantic prayers of a wom-

an who sees her little, every-day, familiar world blow away like sand at the coming of a storm.

Town awoke next morning to find itself conscious of heroic promptings. It wanted to vault to its saddle and ride off to knightly deeds. It did not know in the least what was the matter with it, but separately and unitedly it was in love with the woman preacher. The doors of Magee's yawned wide, but there was no coming nor going, and upon the unholy little settlement rested a Sabbath calm such as they remembered at home. The mood of town became contagious; it absorbed independent elements floating through its dingy civic channels, and stamped them with the current infection. The fame of the woman preacher spread to the uttermost eddy of the tiny settlement; those who had not heard her were swept up and borne along on the enthusiasm of those who had. And town presented the unprecedented spectacle of animation suspended for the great event of the day—the prayer-meeting on the plain of No-Smoke.

Daily the men presented themselves humbly as pilgrims at a shrine. There was not one of them who would not cheerfully have made a crony of death for the

chance of her favor, and yet there was not one who thought himself worthy to kiss the hem of her garment. Jarvis, be it said, had no share in these humilities. He thought himself worthy any favor that his vandal hand might grasp. Women were dolls to Jarvis—dolls of small consequence. For the same reason —the courage that rushes in and casteth out fear—it was Jarvis who elected to act as deputy and bring the gifts of game to the camp. During the visits he managed to establish something approaching intimacy with the old man. He led him to talk of the days when he had been a power in the politics of the corner store at home; the days before Miriam had sold their all and gone to preach in the wilderness. The old man had begun to look forward to these visits of Jarvis as agreeable intervals of secularity.

It had come to be the last day; the prayer-meeting that evening would bring the week to a close. Miriam, spent with the vigil of many wakeful nights, torn by cruel questionings, took her overburdened spirit to the silent counsel of the great plain where it gave to the valley. Her resting-place was a giant boulder enshrined in the twilight of the

willow grove, which became as the judgment-seat to the woman preacher. There were stern questionings to be put by Miriam the judge, which Miriam the woman must answer. An hour passed, the inquisition lagged; the judge came down from the bench and joined hands with the prisoner in the dock, the culprit, in whom there began to grow a subdued choking suspense: "Would he come? No, he could not be coming or her heart would not drag like an anchored thing." Then, for a moment, she saw the question clearly,—she had consented to remain because her will, fluid, unstable, had flowed into the mould of his inclination like water into a vessel. She shut her eyes and prayed for strength, and when she opened them horse and rider stood sharp against the sky-line. The wisdom of the judge, the perturbation of the woman, prompted nothing more than a mouthful of futile incongruous speeches.

He slid from his horse. There was about him the air of one who brings great treasure; youth and spring and sunshine and great strength he seemed to heap at her feet.

"I've come for my answer, Miriam." He took her hand like a flower already plucked—a flower whose fragrance had

grown to be something of a matter of course. It was this imperious quality that was at the root of Jarvis's success. He rode at life full tilt, the force of victory in his very aim. There was no time for questionings. The clatter of his horse's hoofs claimed attention, and the beauty, the insolence, the precision of his aim won the day.

He brushed aside her arguments; he had not come to listen to objections, but to trample them underfoot. They loved —that was the supreme answer. What did they owe the world, their world, a handful of locoed cow-punchers,—every mother's son of whom was in love with her and lacked the wit to know it? They came snivelling after salvation,—much use they had of it in the lives they led.

Miriam received these statements as so many indictments against herself. They had come to hear her, then, because she was a woman,—of her ministerings there had been no need. She hung her head with the shame of it.

But Jarvis had again taken up the reel of his argument, flung it broadcast, unwound it so swiftly that her dazed perceptions could scarce follow. Her father would be happier in town. The makeshifts of the wagon life were too hard

on one of his years. Leave him what money there was left, and when they should be settled in California they could send for him. Her own work should go on; it would be all the better for a little happiness. He would lend her gladly to her poor, to the sick, to those in tribulation. She should teach him the secret of her beautiful service,—together they would do the work she loved.

For one pitilessly clear moment Miriam saw the true and the false go up and down like buckets in a well. She saw her arid journeyings over the desert, the fretful complaining of her father, the hunger, the thirst, the desolation, the little done, the undone vast. And then this man had come and held the cup of life enchantingly to her lips, the cup that she must put from her because it was unholy.

But again the man's voice was adjusting the balances, turning her little world awry by its potent sorcery. And Miriam sat on the judgment-seat, a dazed spectator at the drama of her life. "The good that's in the world when the heart is happy! It overflows, my dear, like that little singing creek bringing plenty to the ranch-lands below. I feel it in

my heart, all the generous promptings that"—he laughed up at her boyishly—"that I ain't had a bowin' acquaintance with for years. Ah, my girl, the taste of life had grown sour in my mouth till I heard your voice that day on No-Smoke,—the day I grinned, Miriam—do you remember?"

She remembered that, and every moment he had been in her life from that first evening. They were silent, the shadows were growing longer, the magic of that perfect day made the gift of silent comradery an estimable estate. No-Smoke had the quiescent delights of the land of lotus.

And presently they could hear the old man's quavering treble calling for Miriam from below.

"Father is calling." She sprang up, clutching at this forlorn hope of escape. Jarvis caught and crushed her to him:

"To-morrow morning, at sunrise, I'll have the horses ready."

She struggled for a moment, like a frantic child, then was quiet.

"To-morrow morning, at sunrise," he said, as one who impresses a lesson. And she repeated the words after him like one speaking in sleep.

No-Smoke will never forget that last

prayer-meeting. They all came but Jarvis, who pleaded that he had work to do, and—with a shrug—that he had grown a little tired of preaching petticoats; so they had ridden away without him, while the sun was yet an hour high, in all their ruffianly picturesqueness of apparel—spurs, sombreros, cartridge-belts, shaps, and silk handkerchiefs whipping the breeze, their faces as grave as if their errand had been a lynching. Miriam did not keep them long waiting. She had been ready, though it was earlier by half an hour than the time set for the service. She looked neither to the right nor left as she walked without a trace of self-consciousness to the big uncovered wagon that was to serve as a pulpit. The change that had come over her in the last twenty-four hours was startling. She was no longer the young sibyl whose heart is wrung that she must speak the sorrowful words of human destiny; she was a woman who had drained the chalice of living to its last dregs; a woman who looked at them with a face like the worn bed of a torrent. The golden quality of her voice—a yearning note that sang beneath its sweetness and would have been potent to solace souls in the pit—had fled. The prophetess in her had turned to dust

and ashes. Her eyes were wide, as one who walks in sleep, her face had the pallor of death, her voice rang harsh in bitterly accusing accents:

"For I have sold Thee, my Master, for a paltrier thing than the thirty pieces, and though my hands were red I went about and made believe to do Thy work. Like Judas I have wept till mine eyes are blinded to Thy mercies, and no sound comes to mine ears but the wailing of the damned. Lift me up, O God, lest the waters of despair close over me!"

Once, twice, she swayed; then fell forward. The unconsciousness was but momentary, for again she faced them, weak of body, but not infirm of will. "Go, all of you,—you have no need of my shepherding."

It was dark on the plain of No-Smoke. The moon ploughed through a furrow of blackness, then left the ungracious night to its own dour mood. Very small and futile seemed the temporary home-making of the woman preacher on that stark, lonely plain. The woman herself lay on the piled bedquilts within the tent, and from time to time the old man looked at her with the helpless concern of a child. They were quite alone. But presently she began to turn restlessly and, in spite

of her father's protestations, to occupy herself with domestic affairs.

"Are you mad?" he called, angrily, to her, when he saw that she had caught the horses and was harnessing them to the wagon. "Are you stark mad to try to travel to-night, when you fainted, and ben making a fool of yourself in the bargain?"

"Dear father," she answered, with loving forbearance, "God is leading us away from this dreadful place. This place of temptation. Only trust Him." He watched her in silent wonder. But a little while and she had been so feeble, and now she moved and did as if there had been magic in her veins. And presently all was in readiness for the exodus. It was the sick woman who forced the initiative, who led the protesting old man to the wagon, helped him in, put her arms about him as one would soothe an ailing child. The horses, fresh from their week's grazing, tossed their heads and sniffed the air in readiness for the journey. Eight iron-shod hoofs struck sparks from the road as they sped across the old snake trail, and presently they came to the fork of the road, and the lights of town flashed like stars in the purple west. The upper fork led to the solitary trail across the desert,

across the great white plains of alkali. The lower fork dipped toward the town with its lights and human comradeship. But without a moment's hesitation the woman took the fork that led above the town—and temptation. Her father had dozed and wakened, and when they were well along the desert road and the lights of town were far behind he asked,

"Isn't it very dark on the trail, Miriam?"

"Very dark on the trail, father."

A Little Pioneer

BY PHILIP VERRILL MIGHELS

ON the autumn day when Nick McKey came driving the bi-monthly stage, full four days late, into Poco del Oro mining-camp, with a wee small child, hardly three years of age, on the seat up top beside his dusty knee, the trials, tribulations, and perplexities of the insignificant community were instantly augmented,—for the new-come little pilgrim was a girl.

McKey approached the town in the late afternoon, when the toilers were nearly all come down from their hillside mining-holes and the major portion of the camp's inhabitants had focussed in and about the grocery-post-office-saloon.

They took a quick, sharp look at a sight such as never had been seen in the camp before — the dusty Nick with a dusty little blue-clad figure at his side, as the four dusty horses and the dusty coach came toiling up the final

climb of the highway to halt at length in their midst. And the tiny passenger was as smiling and winning a bit of innocent, delighted femininity as any one could desire.

"Well," said a voice, "I'll be damned!"

"Civilization!" yelled another. "Hurray fer McKey, a-fetchin' us civilization!"

"Whoa!" commanded the driver, kicking on his brake. "Shut up, you Grigg; you're scarin' the team. What's eatin' you, man? This ain't nuthin' but that there William Scott's little gal, come by reg'lar express, accordin' to orders."

"Scott's little— Oh!" said a small, bearded man at the wheel of the stage. "Why, Nick, I'd clean forgot. He sent to have her come, of course; he told me all about it, Nick; but, say—poor Scott!—he died a week ago, and natchelly you knowed nothin' about it."

An inarticulate chorus of murmurs in the crowd made the silence that followed peculiarly intense.

"Dead?" repeated McKey at last. "I've fetched her here, all alone in the world, and the little gal's father is dead! Scott? Then he wasn't as strong as he looked."

"He was thin as a pick," imparted the small man, speaking with suppressed emo-

tion. "It was pluck made him look kind of strong. . . . By gingerbread! Nick, I wonder what we're goin' for to do?"

"'Bout what?" inquired a teamster. "He's buried, Tom, best we could on the money. What more can we do?"

"I was thinkin' of this here little express passenger," answered Tom; "the little gal, arrove here all alone."

Those of the men who were not already gazing at the child on the seat above their heads now directed their attention to her unanimously. From such a broadside of masculine glances as she now found herself receiving the little thing shrank a trifle against the arm of McKey, whom she seemed to regard as an institution of security and trust. Despite her slight confusion, however, she smiled upon every kindly-looking person in the group. And what a wonderful bright-brown pair of eyes they were from which she smiled!—roguish, challenging, trustful, unafraid, and lustrous as jewels newly fashioned. Her two little chubby hands were busily twisting the hem of her dusty blue dress, her two chubby legs were straight out before her, the worn little shoes projecting over the edge of the cushion. On her head she wore a faded brown woollen hood, beneath

the edge of which the brightest and lightest old-gold curl of hair was prettily waiting to dance. Alone in the mountains with all these men, she seemed as happy and as friendly as if her one possible baby-wish had been granted at once by the goddess of chance. That she could not know of her losses and her plight, could not comprehend the talk of the men who blurted out the truth, was, as a matter of fact, the one touch of mercy so far vouchsafed her helpless babyhood.

"Kind of a bully little gal," ventured one of the miners.

"Of course she's a bully little gal," replied the bearded Tom Devoe. "But, Scott bein' gone—"

"That's it," interrupted the driver from his seat. "Scott bein' gone, who's a-goin' to take the kid and pay? There's two hundred dollars express charges for bringin' her in from that Utah camp, for it's near three hundred miles of stagin', and her sent forward by fast express, and 'handle with care' told every driver, special. Did Scott leave the money, Tom, for to pay the company's charges?"

"He didn't leave money enough to pay for all we done to make the funeral look like the genuine article," imparted Devoe. "I don't know why he sent for the pore

little gal, except I guess there was nothin' else to do; and of course he didn't reckon on cashin' in his stack so sudden. You see, he never had no luck, anyhow. Him and his pretty young wife struck out from down in Ohio, four years ago, for to emigrant acrost the plains and git to the mines with a load of things to sell and make a stake—and they jest about had a hell of a time, accordin' to some ways of thinkin'."

"Don't be swearin' before the little gal," cautioned the driver, who had "cussed" his team over forty miles of mountain ruggedness. "Go kind of decent,—anyways for a starter. With a boy kid everybody knows it's diff'rent. That's all, Tom; go on with your rat-killin'."

"Scuse me," answered Tom. "Well, as I was sayin', first Scott got sick, then his wife was kind of ailin', and up and had a little gal baby out on the plains. Then—"

"This here little gal?" interrupted Grigg. "Little Civilization?"

"Yep—same child. Then after that they lost two horses in the fordin', and some of their freight was burned at night by Injuns, and some was traded off for hay and grub, and a lot went to square off the doctor when the baby come along,—

and Scott said they'd 'a' bin mighty glad to trade it all for her; and it took them near three years, after that, to git to a camp in Utah, and that's where they quit a-goin' for a while, till Scott got promise of a job out here in the Poco d'Oro mines, and—"

"Rottonest 'pology for mines I ever see," interpolated a listener.

"Well, I don't know," answered Tom. "Point is, Scott come on, leavin' his wife and little gal behind, fer safety and fam'-ly comfort, over to that Utah camp—and it pretty soon no good to stay in, after the strike at Thunder River; and then he's gittin' news that Mrs. Scott was sick, and later she was dead, and the baby took by strangers. So Scott he sent to have her come, and here she is."

"Yes—and two hundred dollars express charges, c. o. d.," added McKey. "And who's a-goin' to pungle up the same?"

There were many "ahems" to break an otherwise impressive silence.

"Well, I don't see how you can take her back—no place to take her," ventured Devoe. "Too pretty to take back, anyhow. I'd hate to see you takin' the little thing away," and he looked at the child with a species of hunger in his eyes. "I ain't jest got the money," Tom confessed.

"If there's anybody else—" and he looked about in the knot of men, only to find the attention of each one suddenly engrossed with something personal.

Unfortunately, Poco del Oro had been more or less of a false alarm. Its wealth was still to be uncovered. Its first excitement had been dead a year, and many of its early population had departed. There was not a single family of man, wife, and children in the place. There was one good young woman remaining—Mistress Nancy Dunn, the daughter of Dunn who hauled in wood from the habitable world,—and she had said her nay to the marriage proposal of nearly every man in town. To little Tom Devoe she had answered thus no less than thrice, on the last occasion lending a species of emphasis to her decision by dashing a bucketful of water in her suitor's face, —with water at ten cents a gallon.

Tom was reflectively dwelling on Nancy's charms, despite his recent discouragements. He even saw new glimmerings of hope as he gazed fondly up at Scott's little gal, smiling in coyness down upon him.

"Well—Nick—if only I could borrow the money, why, perhaps—" he faltered, and again he left his sentence in the air.

"Borry? Haw!" said a voice, and a few men guffawed.

"What's her name?" inquired a spectator.

"Nancy," answered Tom, in his passing abstraction.

"Haw!" repeated that raucous voice.

"We know 'bout that old game; but I mean the little gal's," explained the interrogator. "What's the little gal's name?"

"Her folks," said Devoe, "they named her Prairie, fer where she was born. She's a regular little pioneer; and I'd hate to see her took away from here."

"Cash down, or return the shipment—them's the orders on all the c. o. d.'s," observed the driver, once again. "I ain't been drivin' long, perhaps, but I know the rules—sometimes. So, Tom, if you want to keep the little passenger—"

"I'd like to see her stay, first rate," said Tom, whose hunger for children was growing apace. "There's no place to take her if you fetch her back. . . . Say, Nick, couldn't you leave her on thirty days' trial? Regular thing for every express to leave things on trial. You see, you could leave little Prairie that way, and after thirty days—why, either we'd pay the two hundred, or— We'd know

more about things than we know jest now, dead sure. You see, Nick, it ain't like as if 'twas a boy. You never can tell about gals. But you jest leave her with me on thirty days' trial, for fun."

Nick scratched the back of his head.

"It sounds like it might be 'cordin' to some of the rules I've heard," said he. "I know I've heard 'bout sech an arrangement somewheres or other; but, Tom, I'd have to ask Barney to ask ole Pete to ask young Tomkins to ask the company's agent, down to the end of Stetson's run."

"All right," Tom agreed. "You can leave her with me on that understandin'."

The tiny passenger, sitting all this while at the driver's side, was duly removed from the seat. She stuck like a bur to McKey's dusty coat and had to be taken off with care. Nevertheless, as a bur will stick impartially to the very next garment presenting an opportunity, she adhered to the faded green of Devoe's old vest with ready cheer and friendliness, looking back at the driver without a reproach from her newly acquired situation.

A subtle ecstasy spread throughout Tom Devoe's being as he felt the warm little burden on his arm; and away to his little shack he trudged in triumph.

The time for men to become solicitous concerning the management of property is the moment in which some other individual acquires the property in question. There were six worthy citizens of Poco del Oro whose growing anxiety over the rearing of little Prairie Scott became so acute, that very first evening of the tiny girl's arrival, that a visit to her newest home became absolutely imperative. They moved on the cabin in a body.

The shack was half a dugout, half a structure, the front elevation being fashioned of barrel-staves, cleverly lapped and securely hammered to a framework of beams. It possessed a window with a broken glass, and a solid maple door, brought straight from New York by way of San Francisco and the isthmus, and sold to build a house around in any known style of the art. A dim red light was shown in the window as the men came boldly to the place. Just at the moment of their arrival a fearful din and clatter within the cabin abruptly assaulted the silence.

"There!" said the muffled voice of Tom. "Ain't you busy?"

The men went in. Little Prairie was there. She had just succeeded in drag-

ging down a large collection of pots and pans, all of them laden with rich, greasy soot. For herself, she was generously daubed with black from head to foot, particularly as to hands and face.

Tom was looking at her helplessly. He seemed relieved at beholding the number and size of his visitors.

"Darn'dest little kid I ever saw," said he. "She's burned up one of my boots already, and spoiled my dress-up pants, and broke my gun. Awful healthy little kid—awful ambitious and willin'. . . . But she sort of likes old Tom."

The little object of his summary appeared to comprehend that something was due to Tom by way of establishing her compensating virtues. She came towards him enthusiastically and threw her arms about his knees.

"Baby—yoves — ole — Tom," she announced, in broken accents of sincerity. "Baby—*do*—yove—ole—Tom."

Tom caught her up, and she clutched his beard in both her sooty hands, and smiled in his eyes bewitchingly.

"It's lucky your house is pretty strong," remarked one of the visiting contingent. "I kin see you're goin' to raise her up deestructive."

"You can't begin readin' her nice

gentle stories a minute too soon," added another. "Have you got the *Bunion's Progress,* by a feller named Mr. Christian?"

"Readin'?" said the camp's profoundest pessimist, scornfully. "What she wants is work. Leave her chop the wood; that 'll gentle her down."

"Say! do you think this child is another of them dead-from-workin' wives of your'n?" demanded Devoe, indignantly. "If you fellers came here to pesterfy and try to run the show, why, you're jest a mite too late, boys. Savvy? I reckon this here cat-hop kind of elects me general sup'intendent."

Civilization Grigg was one of the visitors. He stood there in rapture, gazing on the child, his nature yearning for a small caress.

"We only come to offer a few kind and useful suggestions," he now explained. "That's all."

"You can leave out the kind ones," Tom replied. "I never heard no 'kind' suggestions yet that wasn't ground pretty sharp on two or three edges."

"Biggest lot of cheek I ever see," grumbled the pessimist. "If it gits any bigger it 'll crowd the mountains off the camp."

"Well, don't you hang around and git made uncomfortable when it happens," answered Devoe. "How about that, little honey?"

"Baby—do—yove—ole—Tom," the tot repeated, smearing his neck with a sooty essence of her growing affection as she gave him an enviable hug.

Those of the men who had not discovered seats upon arriving now sat in the bunk at the end of the room. Four of the half-dozen visitors were desperately seining their minds to net some small remark that would sound as if they really knew a baby from a grindstone.

"Well—'hem!" said Billy Partridge, the smallest man in town,—"the only thing I thought of, Tom, was the climate. Are you dead-certain sure this climate is just exactly right to raise up a girl youngster into?"

"Certain!" said Tom, with ready conviction. "Climate is generally pretty decent anywheres till it gits sort of sp'iled by too many people cussin' at it, night and day. But there ain't men or wimmin enough in all Nevady yet to swear this climate sour."

"I ain't seen a baby for so long, I couldn't tell laughin' from cryin'," confessed big Dan White. "I used to know

how to hold one, Tom, and maybe I ain't forgot." He came towards little Prairie tentatively. "Want to take an assay of me?" he inquired, and he held forth his arms invitingly.

The youngster looked at him gravely, then snuggled coyly up to Tom and smiled like a born coquette.

"Guess not," decided Dan; but no sooner were his arms again at his side than Prairie made overtures to lure him back. He took her, somewhat clumsily, and yet with a knowledge of the business. Then, when he had her, he knew not what to say.

"You're doin' pretty fancy, Miss Scott," he informed her presently, and carried her over to the window.

Tom commenced to restore a semblance of order in the cabin.

"A woman ain't never so young she can't raise hell in about two minutes," he observed, as a generalization, and sagely he added, "That's one of the reasons we like 'em."

"Bad sign when a gal kid takes too sudden to strangers," grumbled the pessimist. "When I was a child—"

"You never was no child," interrupted Devoe. "You was born so old you was already gittin' fermented."

Dan White had thought of another bit of information to impart to little Prairie.

"Miss Scott, this weather is gen'ral throughout the United States and Canady," said he; "raw, with westerly wind."

"Yes, and that reminds me, I've got to cut up some wearin' apparel and make her a warm woollen dress," said the practical Tom, who thereupon produced scissors, needles, thread, a sailmaker's "palm," in lieu of a thimble, and the faded magenta garment he had in his mind to convert to brand-new usefulness. "I long ago found out," he concluded, "that charity often begins at the tail of a shirt that's worn out higher up."

He now had White place the youngster on the floor while he "sized her up" for the dress that was to be. She started away, when the measuring was finished, to make her fiftieth tour of the cabin.

"Regular born prospector," Tom observed, as he watched her going. "Never saw her equal in the world. Samples everything in sight in about two bats of your eye."

The small "pioneer" stumbled flat across some obstruction on the floor, but was not in the least disconcerted. She stood on her head and feet for a mo-

ment, regaining her perpendicular in youngster fashion, and finding that one of her shoes was holding down a soft, dark something that she wanted, she stood there solidly and pulled at the object with all her sturdy might. It presently tore, and so came up about her chubby leg, her foot having cleaved through the substance. Encased as it were in this ring that would not release her knee, she approached her foster-father laboriously.

"Tate it off," she requested. "Tom, tate it off."

"What is it, then?" said the busy Tom. "Why—it must be somebody's hat!"

The pessimist snatched it, somewhat excitedly. "Mine—and plumb ruined forever!" he said. "Stay here? me?—in your shack, with such a child as that? Not for a million in gold! A terrible, devastatin' scourge!" and out of the cabin, in anger, he went, and slammed the door behind him.

But the others, when they finally departed from the shack, went forth with a quieter spirit.

"You mark my word, the wonderful men was all of 'em little," said Partridge. "There was little old Bony Napoleon, and now here's Tom Devoe."

No corner of the earth is so remote

that a man may forever escape a visit from desperation. Even Tom Devoe was receiving marked attentions from this brother-in-fact of common worry.

It was not in the matter of sewing, cooking, or amusing that Tom found his resources lacking; it all lay in something ascribable to things feminine that troubles seemed to hover over the cabin. Tom had made the dress, and made it well. He had a skill as fine as a woman's with his scissors and his threads, and he had the loving wish that prompts domestic energy. He had made little stockings and a "nightie," warm as toast. He was making little leather boots, already painted brilliant red, and as crude in construction as they were gaudy in decoration; and other things he had in process of planning; nevertheless there were family cares that baffled his "motherly" possibilities.

For the fourth time he sought Miss Nancy's presence. She had heard all about the thirty-day trial of the child, and the look on the face of her suitor when he came was a sign she read with ease. The "trial" was growing intense.

"You ain't been around to see the little pioneer," said he. "I kind of expected you'd sort of float around."

"I ain't lost no double-orphan children," said Nancy, "and they ain't no great curiosity."

"They are when they've got a single man for a father and mother," answered Tom. "And she'd be a curiosity anyhow, you bet! She's wonderful healthy and willin'. You really ought to see her, jest for fun."

"It's more fun guessin' what you come here for to-night," she said, and her eyes were snappily bright.

Tom wriggled on his chair uneasily. He knew her guessing of old.

"Well, then—'hem!" he faltered, coloring yet more red beneath his florid complexion,—"are you—goin' for to say you'll up and do it, Nancy?—hey?"

"No, I ain't goin' to up and do it, nor down and do it, neither," she told him, with decision. "I told you so before."

"Yes, but this time you git a chance to be a mother right from the jump," he argued, soberly. "Ain't that something?"

"No, it ain't. No second-hand mother for me," she said. "I reckon I'll be the mother of my own bawlin' kids when I start."

"She ain't a great one to cry," Tom hastened to impart. "I'll guarantee to git up nights and walk her if she cries.

Come on, Nancy, be a real nice gal and say you will. Your father's perfectly willin'."

"Didn't I say no?" she demanded. "My father, hey? Because he can't git away with my little sack of money he'd let me marry any decent man in camp, and then sit down and wait to see if my lovely husband could git those three hundred dollars. No, sir, I won't, I won't, I won't, and that's where the story says F-i-n-i-s—with the h left off every time. So you might as well go home and forget you came."

"If you'd seen the little gal you'd answer different," said Devoe, persistently. "Hadn't you better see her first?"

"I've seen her, don't you worry," answered Miss Dunn. "What do you think I am? And don't I know that seven days have gone already, and only twenty-three more is left of your thirty, and you thought you'd marry me and git my money to pay them two hundred dollars, c. o. d., at the end of the time? I said I won't, and now you git, Tom Devoe, for I ain't got time to hear you talk."

"All right," said Tom; "but you're 'way off your boundaries concernin' your money. I never had no idea in the world of askin' you to pay up the charges."

This was the truth. He had well-nigh forgotten that thirty-day condition and the price still due for retaining little Prairie. He went away from Nancy's with a large new collection of worries.

It was raining and blowing together that night, but he seemed to be oblivious of everything. A warm little stove in his heart was glowing cheerily so soon as he came to his house.

And inside the place big Dan White had the baby on his knee.

"Miss Scott," he said, as Tom entered, "this storm is gen'ral throughout the United States and Canady."

The following week there was snow on the ground, and little Miss Scott, not a whit less busy for the chill, got lost for an hour in the nearest drift, and nearly froze her tiny feet. She developed a cold and a croupy-sounding cough that frightened poor Tom half to death.

It was when that tiny cold was two days old and Prairie was ill and listless and weak, no longer blithesomely "dee-structive," but needing such a tender love and care as only a woman may bestow, that Tom's desperation reached its culminating-point. He feared the little pioneer was perhaps already dying; and

then the man was suddenly prepared for any deed of daring.

"My poor little gal has got to have a mother," he declared. "It ain't been fair; it ain't been right; and now it's gone too far. She's goin' to have whatever there is in this here Poco d'Oro camp, if it takes a gun to clinch the point."

He strapped on a mighty revolver, full of lead and dirty black powder, and marched him straight to the home of Nancy Dunn.

"We're goin' to git married—right now," said he, "so, Nancy—put on your duds."

Miss Dunn was tremendously amazed. She was also a little alarmed.

"Why — you, Tom Devoe — you're crazy!" she stammered. "Why, what do you—mean? You know I—said I wouldn't, and—"

"Yep! I know what you said," he interrupted, drawing his gun with a shaking hand, "but you're goin' to change your mind, and change it quick. That pore little motherless child, she's goin' to have a woman for to love. She's goin' to have some proper care. She's goin' to have a decent show to live and grow up proper—savvy that? And you are the

one decent girl in the camp, and you and me is a-goin' to go and git married—that's the game. You put on your hat, or come along without, for we're goin' right now to Justice Knapp."

Nancy had long been accustomed to pistols, but never before had she seen one in this awful threatening aspect, its bullets so terribly obvious, its muzzle so blankly centred on her face. She looked at it nervously, then at the eyes behind it—the two eyes grown desperate and marked with signs of worry.

She feared the man more than the weapon—and she feared those bullets horribly. She put on her bonnet, shaking in fright all the while. Her impulse was to cry, but all her crying faculties were shrinking down in terror. As one no longer consulted by her own volition, she went from the door.

"I ain't a-goin' to hold this gun on you constant," Tom informed her, indulgently, trembling himself, "but don't you try no shenanigan, not for a minute!"

In silence they wended their way to the home of the justice of the peace. Briefly and promptly, despite Miss Nancy's reluctance, the old-fashioned, time-honored formula for making a unit out of two warring individuals was pro-

nounced, after which, still awed and paralyzed with fear, the new-made wife was led quietly away.

Convoyed by her armed and sinister husband, Nancy went with him quite to his shack. But she took not so much as a look at little Prairie, lying in a blanket before the open fire, engrossed as she was in watching Tom. No sooner had he laid off his huge revolver than she pounced upon it and threw it out of the window, where it disappeared in a drift of snow. Then ensued a brief, sharp *dénouement,* after which the door was wrenched wildly open and out ran the bride, leaving Tom, bewildered and dazed, sitting on the floor, with just a ragged piece of calico in his hand as a souvenir of a quick divorce.

That night all the story was old in the camp; and big Dan White, when he came to Tom's, saw signs of resignation to a life of single blessedness depicted large upon the homely countenance of the whilom groom.

"Have you heerd from Nancy this evenin'?" he said. "How was she at last accounts?"

"Pursuin' the even terror of her ways," said Tom, "jest about the same as before."

"Well," reflected Dan, "you can take a horse to the crick, Tom, of course—"

"I know," said Tom; "I know all about that part which says you can't make him drink—and, Dan, if the horse is a *mare* —she'll prob'ly throw you down and run away into the bargain."

Miss Prairie Scott was only half-way her "healthy and willin'" little self, after five long days of cold and fever and masculine care, and Tom was attempting to lighten her life with tales of her "mother's" shocking conduct, when the dark wing of fate was suddenly over the cabin, obscuring all the light.

The bimonthly stage was once more in town, and with it had come a harsh decree. The mighty express corporation had forwarded a quick decision in the case of Tom's small pioneer. The two hundred dollars "charges" for her transportation as an express parcel must be paid without another day's delay, or the child must be immediately taken away and delivered to the company's agent, three hundred miles towards the east.

Devoe heard the "sentence" like one in a trance. He had put off the thought of the whole affair till his full thirty days should be counted. He was dazed thus

to find himself obliged to face the crisis prematurely. The driver now come was a man unknown to Tom or any of his friends. But, for that matter, friendship could hardly have availed to alter the company's attitude of relentlessness.

"I'll try to hustle the money," said Devoe. "I couldn't let the baby go. Why, man, she'd die. She couldn't make a trip like that such weather as this, and her jest pickin' up a little after bein' pretty sick. I couldn't leave her go."

As a matter of fact, he was suddenly sick throughout his entire system. It was one worry more than he could readily bear. His own little hoard contained exactly thirty-five dollars; and how many friends could he count on here in this poor little worked-out camp, where he and others were hanging on from sheer force of habit and hope?

He thought of defiance, of thrusting a pistol in the driver's face and bidding him run for his life. He thought of flight, with the child in his arms, across the hills to a western town. The huge barrier of mountains, now white with snow and chill with icy blasts, rose before him, silent, forbidding.

Of all the six worthy citizens who had taken an interest sufficient to cause them

to visit the small pioneer, there were only four who could lend assistance in raising a fund to defray those appalling charges. Civilization Grigg, who builded with mud, had fifteen dollars in all the world. He gave the entire sum. Billy Partridge could spare but an even five. The pessimist, masking his feeling behind a growl, came along with eight silver dollars; and big Dan White gave all he would have for a month, and it counted twenty-two. The total amount in the fund was eighty-five dollars. It lacked just one hundred and fifteen dollars of being sufficient—and resources thoroughly exhausted.

Tom, Dan, Partridge—even the pessimist—all the worried clan spent the remainder of the day attempting to bribe the driver to take their all and leave the child in camp. He was harder than iron, in a quiet, decent way of unanswerable logic that left the group at the cabin baffled and hopeless.

"I'll come here and git her in the morning," he said, and the long, cold night descended on the camp.

The morning came, and with it no solution. Out of a flawless sky the sun was shining on a world of mountains dazzling white in the snow. The wheels of the swiftly approaching stage made

creaking notes as crisp as those of a violin. The men inside the cabin heard the sound with dread.

Out in his shirt-sleeves went Devoe, his eyes dull red from sleeplessness. Beside him stood his friends.

"Shaw," he said to the driver, "the little gal's inside the shack—and that's where she ought to be left, or God Almighty's made a big mistake. God Almighty, I say. He gave this little kid to me, as sure as He ever done anything good on earth. He knowed she didn't have a decent friend in all this country, and He gave her to me to care for. You couldn't take her off, and maybe see her die; you ain't got the heart for to do it. Here's all the money we kin raise—it's eighty-five dollars, and nearly half the charges. Take that and ask the company if they can't let off a little kid for less than the whole two hundred. If she hadn't come by express, the stage fare wouldn't 'a' bin more than fifty dollars."

"Devoe," replied the driver, "don't talk this all over again. I hate to tell you no a thousand times. And I've got to make a start."

Tom looked weak and pale. His mind refused to conjure up another word of argument.

"She'll have to be wrapped real warm," he said, and as one hard hit and no longer able to think or resist he turned towards the house.

The pessimist growled at the driver in accents of biting sarcasm as vain as they were unique.

When Tom came out of the house, with the child on his arm, she was lovingly patting his cheek.

"Baby—*do* — yove — ole — Tom," she said, in her honest little coo.

The man's knees nearly gave way beneath him.

"I can't let her go—I can't give her up," he said to them all. "Boys—I'm goin' to pay my fare and go along. I'll work for her hard—I'll work off the charges—I'll git her all for my own—and some day maybe we'll come back. I'll—"

He paused, and the baby lifted her pretty little head to listen to something in the passing breath of frost. It came from the rear of the cabin, a brisk creak, creak on the snow.

Then suddenly, running in breathless haste, from around the corner of the shack came Nancy Dunn, her hair brownly flying in the crystal air, her eyes ablaze with eagerness.

"Here," she panted at the driver—

"here's your two hundred dollars—here it is! Take it—take it—you can't—you can't have—the baby!"

For a moment there was absolute silence.

"Well—now—how's this?" inquired the startled driver. "Who are you?"

"I'm Tom's—I'm Mrs. Devoe," she said. "I'm his wife—and I've just come home." Her cheeks unfurled a rich and wholesome damask blush that made her positively handsome. She turned to Tom and took little Prairie in her arms.

When he got his chance, big Dan White held the baby again on his knee. "Miss Scott," he said, "this sunshine is gen'ral throughout the United States and Canady."

Back to Indiana

BY ELMORE ELLIOTT PEAKE

THE rising sun had not yet drunk the dew from the grass in the door-yard of the lone cabin when the man mounted the forward hub of the prairie-schooner and bent a final glance into the dusky interior to make sure that nothing had been forgotten. He inventoried the contents with his eye: a mattress for his wife, baby boy, and little Nellie to sleep on; blankets and comforters—somewhat faded and ragged—for himself and Roy to make a bunk of, on the ground; a box of extra clothing, cooking utensils, lantern, rope, shotgun, family Bible—badly shattered,—and a hen-coop, containing seven pullets, lashed to the end-gate. A wooden bucket hung from the rear axletree, to which was also chained a black and white setter. The only superfluous article seemed to be a little mahogany bureau, battered and warped, but still retaining an air of dis-

tinction which set it apart from the other tawdry furnishings, and marked it as a family treasure.

Daggett stepped to the ground again, and, folding his arms, swept his dull, faded eyes over the limitless savanna, still gray with the mists of night. Here, for five weary, heart-breaking years, he had pitted his puny arm against rebellious Nature and fought the elements on their chosen ground. He had been eaten up by grasshoppers; tossed by cyclones; alternately scorched by strange, hot winds and frozen by shrieking blizzards; desiccated by droughts and flooded by cloudbursts. His horses and cattle had sickened and died; his wife had faded and grown old in a day; one of his children had been laid under the tough, matted sod which almost turned the edge of a plough; and he, never rich, had grown poorer and poorer. It was not strange, perhaps, that he had come to look upon that vast, treeless expanse, the playground of elemental passions, as a monster lying in wait for his blood.

"The curse of God upon you, I hate you!" he burst out, with the sudden fury which the elements had taught him. But a better mood instantly following, his eyes softened with a light to which they

had long been strange. "Back to God's country—back to Indiana!" he exclaimed, and laughed aloud.

Roy, his nine-year-old boy, looked up at the unusual sound; but his father had plunged into the dismantled cabin again. He returned with a can of green paint in his hand, and had soon roughly lettered the canvas wagon-top with the inspired words, on one side, "Back to God's Country"; on the other, "Back to Indiana." Then hurling the can of paint out into the sunburnt grass with all his strength, he cried, gayly, "There, grasshoppers, eat that—you fiddlin' demons that air so fond of green stuff!"

A stooped, flat-breasted woman, but with the remnants of beauty still clinging to her thin, pale face, came around the corner of the house. She, too, had been taking a last look about. A black cat alternately trotted in front of her and arched its back across her skirts.

"Rufus, I feel as if we ought to take the cat," said she, hesitatingly. "I hate to leave any living thing *here*."

"Throw him in! Always room for one more!" cried her husband, jovially.

She glanced up gratefully at his unexpected good-nature, and then took a final, solicitous look about her. Just as the

prospect of quick wealth had not intoxicated her, as it had her husband, when they sold out in Indiana and started West, so the reverses they had since suffered had not sullened and hardened her. Likewise, though this home-going was filling her depleted veins with new life, she could not bubble over as Rufus and the children did. Instead, she wet her pillow with softly flowing, peaceful tears, in the stillness of the night.

"Now I must go over to Willie's grave," said she, quietly. It was plain that this duty had been reserved for the last.

She did not ask her husband to go with her, and he did not volunteer to go. But he watched her with chastened eyes as she crossed the field to the slight rise which, for want of a better name, they had always called "the hill." The little grave was already covered with a tangle of wild roses, trumpet-vine, and prairie-grass; the headboard was gray and weather-beaten, and the rudely carved name half obliterated. Nature was claiming her own. A few summers and winters would come and go, with their beating rains and merciless freezes; and then there would be nothing, not even a little mound, to mark the spot where Willie,

after spinning his brief thread of life, had been laid away. Scalding tears ran down the mother's cheeks at the thought.

"I wish it was so we could take him up and lay him with the others, back home," said she, gently, on her return.

"We'll do it sometime, mother," promised Daggett, hopefully. But she knew they never would do it; they would always be too poor.

Owing to the hard times, they had been unable to sell their farm. So they had left it in the hands of a real-estate agent, twenty miles away, who would probably fleece them out of half their dues if he ever sold the place. Their scanty furniture had brought but a pittance, and had it not been for a lucky sale of cattle they might have been unable to get away for another year. As it was, they expected to reach Indiana with practically nothing but the wagon and the span of mules which drew it. But what of that! They would be among friends; they would be in God's country —in old Indiana, where they had been born and raised.

So, buoyed up by hope, that divinest of gifts from above, they were happy. At night they camped by the roadside, tethered the mules, built a fire, and

cooked supper. How sweet the smoky bacon, the johnny-cake smutted with ashes, and the black, creamless coffee tasted! No king ever sat down to more royal fare. Then, after a brief season of talk, and a pipe for Daggett, they lay down and slept in the untainted air of God's great out-of-doors. In the morning they arose with renewed life, fed the mules, cooked breakfast, and began another day's lap on their long journey.

Often the road was hot and dusty, between flat, barren fields. But often, again, it skirted beautiful streams for miles; and after they reached the Ozarks, it wandered through pleasant valleys, forded swift brooks, and climbed cool mountain-sides, in the shade of thick timber. Farmhouses, villages, and cities were sighted, passed, and left behind, in a slow, pleasing panorama. Beyond the Ozarks they began to see birds that they had known back in Indiana; and at sight of the first cardinal, with his breast flaming in the sunlight, Daggett stared with fascinated eyes for a moment, and then burst out: "Look at the redbird, mother! He's just like the one that used to build in our syringa-bush!" Lucy could not remember that he had ever called her attention to a bird before.

The black cat deserted them the first night out, going back home, presumably. But no ill luck ensued, as Daggett half feared it would. Not so much as a nut was lost or a strap broken. Mrs. Daggett continued to improve; the children, though as brown as Malays from dust and tan, had no ache or pain; and Daggett himself forgot to take a dyspepsia tablet for a week.

Yet their bed was not quite one of roses. Thoughts of the future, even in "God's country," occasionally touched the parents with anxiety. Also, in some places, where their dark coats of tan branded them as gipsies, they were looked upon with suspicion. Occasionally a village constable, puffed up with authority, would order them not to camp within the village limits; and sometimes a farmer, attracted by their evening fire, would warn them not to trespass for wood. Again, when the unshorn and grimy Daggett entered a store to purchase groceries or a bale of hay—occasionally the roadside pasture failed—he was now and then made to feel that his room was preferred to his trade. Yet generally they were treated with humanity; and not infrequently a farmer, seeing the children at play of an evening,

would bring out milk or eggs or even a chicken to the camp.

Daggett and his wife usually sat around the fire of a night, after the children had gone to bed, and talked over their prospects. Her heart, like his, was set on getting back the old place, where four of their children had been born and two of them buried. It was only a poor little place of eighty acres, just beyond the fertile belt of Wabash bottomland; but it was home, sweet home, and looking back to it from their exile they forgot its scanty crops and rocky soil.

"If we can't get it back, Rufus, it won't be like going home," said Lucy, one night, gazing into the fire with misty eyes. They were then in Missouri, in the eastern foot-hills of the Ozarks.

"We'll git it back, mother," said Daggett, confidently. His courage ran high these days. "Joinville Haines probably holds it yet, 'cause it ain't likely anybody would want to buy it. Leastways, they didn't seem to want to when we had it to sell. He's a good man. He ain't forgot the time I pulled him out of the crick and saved his life, when we was boys. And I reckon he ain't forgot, either, that he loved you once, Lucy," he added.

She did not answer at once, but her face grew softer. The remnant of its girlish beauty, which child-bearing, drudgery, and ill health had so sadly ravished, showed to better advantage in the soft firelight than in the glare of day.

"Maybe he *has* forgotten," she murmured. "I once feared that he was a man who might forget such things."

Daggett pushed a log farther into the fire with his boot, sending up a shower of sparks, and relit his pipe with a coal.

"Is that the reason you didn't marry him?" he asked, slyly.

She lifted her eyes to his. "I loved *you,* Rufus," said she, quietly, and smiled almost as she used to smile in the days when he had courted her.

A tenderness which had long lain dormant stirred in Daggett's bosom. In the past weeks he had realized as never before the hard life he had led her. He had not provided for her as Joinville Haines would have done. He had complained of his lot, and he had often been cross with her. To marry him she had left a home in which, humble though it was, she had never known privation. She had slaved in his kitchen and about his house. She had borne his children, cheerfully, and with only welcome in

her heart for them as they came along, in a rapid succession under which she had withered like a flower. She had bravely seen three of them lowered in the grave. She had met his fault-finding with the soft answer which turneth away wrath.

She had followed him into the West against her better judgment. For five years she had stood by his side out there, ten miles from a neighbor, twenty from a town, and forty from a railroad. She had cheered him on while he fought grasshoppers, hot winds, drought, blizzards, and his own sinking courage. Never once had she suggested going back to Indiana, though he could see that her strength was failing and her heart breaking. And when at last he had given up, bitter and defeated, she had smoothed the wrinkles from his brow, and put hope in his heart, and raised the rally-cry: "Back to God's country! Back to Indiana!"

"Joinville will let us have the old place back," he repeated. "He ain't got any use for it. He knows I'll pay as I can, and he'll give me time."

"It was such a warm little house, there in the hollow," said she, huskily, contrasting it with the boxlike shell on the prairie, where the northwest gales, tooth-

ed with arctic cold, ravened like a wolf at every crevice for days at a time. "The kitchen was so cozy, too. I used to complain that it was too small, and unhandy. But I never will again—if we get it back."

Daggett's eyes glistened like a boy's. "I wonder if the honeysuckle-vine is still on the well-house. I ain't smelt honeysuckle since we left there."

She smiled at him through sudden tears. "Rufus, I used to think, out on the prairie, when I was so tired all the time, that I'd be content to die, if only the children could be provided for, and I knew that some one would put a sprig of honeysuckle in my hands after I was dead."

When he helped her into the wagon, where she slept, he retained her hand for a moment, in a half-embarrassed way. Then he kissed her. He could not recall when he had kissed her good-night before. Nor could she, as she lay with wide-open, happy, starry eyes.

He arose the next morning with a heart strangely, blissfully light. Something was moulding the old topsyturvy, sordid world over for him again, giving it somewhat the likeness it had borne when he was a boy. As he and Roy

rode along on the front seat, he said to the lad,

"Roy, do you remember the old place?"

"Yes," answered the boy, eagerly. "I remember the crick, with the bridge acrost it—and the little grove of spruce-trees, with the two tombstones — and the old barn with a basement—and a well with a chain and a bucket on each end."

"And the sweetest water in it, Roy, that man ever drunk!" added the father, jubilantly. "I ain't had my thirst rightly quenched since I left it. The first thing you and me 'll do when we drive in is to git a drink of that water—and then bring a gourdful to mother. Eh!" He laughed gayly, and clucked to the mules. "Git ep, boys, git ep! Every step is takin' you nearer to that sweet water, and you kin have some too." Once he would have sullenly struck the animals when they lagged.

At a town called Bonneterre, in Missouri, which they passed through about five o'clock in the afternoon, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was advertised on the billboards for that night.

"Mother," said Daggett, with an inspiration, "I've a notion to camp on the

aidge of town, and take Roy and Nellie to see Uncle Tom. It's a grand show —I seen it once—and they ain't never seen a show in all their lives. It won't cost much."

The mother made no objection. So after supper Daggett and the two children set out for the "Opera-house," leaving Mrs. Daggett, four-year-old Bobbie, and Spot, the setter, in charge of the camp. It was a memorable night for the youngsters; and when Eliza fled across the floating ice in the Ohio, with her child in her arms, Roy, forgetting that it was only a play, leaped to his feet and shouted shrilly, "Oh, paw, them hounds are goin' to git her!"

But on the way home, in the midst of the excited babble of the children, Daggett suddenly paused under a street lamp, and looked down at the diminutive pair with a sickly color overspreading his face. His pocketbook was gone! And it contained all the money he had in the world, except the change remaining from a five-dollar bill which he had broken at the box-office!

A search both along the street and in the opera-house was of no avail, and it was a heavy-hearted man who stretched himself that night beneath the prairie-

schooner. There was no joking or skylarking the next morning as they hitched up the mules—no response to the birds' tuneful sunrise greetings. They were still two hundred and fifty miles from home; the last of the flour had been used for supper, and the side of bacon was almost gone.

The alternative which faced Daggett was to work, beg, or steal. His honesty was of a fibre which would not permit the last, and his rough pride balked at the second. Therefore he must work. But work was not an easy thing for a nomad like him to get; and if he did get it, it would take him some time, perhaps until cold weather, with a family and a pair of mules on his hands, to accumulate enough to last him through to Indiana. The outlook was desperate indeed.

That day their dinner consisted of stale bread—a baker had let Daggett have three loaves for a nickel—and dandelion greens boiled with the last of the bacon. Supper consisted of the same, warmed over; and little Bobbie went to bed crying for something to eat. Daggett swore, with a mighty oath, that the child should have it in the morning, cost what it might.

Two days later they crossed the Mississippi at St. Louis, on the great Eads bridge. Daggett and his wife had looked forward impatiently to the passage of this last great natural barrier between them and home, and the occasion was to have been one of thanksgiving. But the bridge toll made a cruel hole in the rapidly dwindling little store of silver in Daggett's pocket; and though the children were jubilant over the steamboats, and craned their necks to the last to see them, the parents scarcely glanced at the Father of Waters. That night Daggett announced to his wife that he had just a dollar and twenty cents left.

"Something will turn up, husband," said she, bravely, but her lips trembled.

"What *kin* turn up?" asked he, pathetically, and she could not make answer.

They took the old St. Louis and Vincennes stage-road, running due east. Daggett mournfully recalled the exuberance with which he had passed over it five years before, going west. The second day out from St. Louis, while watering their team at a public pump, in a village whose name they did not know nor care to ask, the usual curious group gathered about them.

"Want to sell that bird-dog, mister?" inquired a bystander, who had been noting Spot's points with a critical eye.

Daggett suddenly stopped pumping. He had thought of selling his mules and buying a pair of bullocks. He had thought of selling his wagon and buying a cheaper one. He had even thought of selling the box of clothing. But until this instant his dog, blooded though he was, had no more occurred to him as an asset than one of his children had. Yet why not sell him? Better sell a dog than starve a child. With grim lips he stepped over to the inquirer, so as to get out of ear-shot of the wagon.

"I'll sell him if I kin git his price," said he, almost fiercely. "But it's one that you wouldn't care to pay, I reckon, without tryin' him, and this ain't the season for birds."

"What is your price?" asked the other, as Spot approached his master and looked up inquiringly with his soft, brown eyes. "He's got a good head."

"Twenty-five dollars," answered Daggett, resolutely.

"You don't want much!" grinned the prospective buyer.

"No, not much—for a dog like that," retorted Daggett.

"I like his looks," admitted the man. "He shows his breedin' all right. But all the evidence I've got of his trainin' is your word."

"That's all the evidence you've got or kin git," assented Daggett, coolly. "And it don't make a picayune's worth of difference to me whether you take it or leave it."

His bluster was working, as he perceived from beneath his drooping lids, and the other hesitated.

"If you'd asked me five dollars for that dog, pardner, I'd have refused him. I'd 'a' knowed he was a spoiled pup." He took another whiff at his pipe. "I've been tryin' for three years to get a dog just like that one. He grows on me every minute, and—I'll take him at your price," he ended, abruptly.

"Come into this store," said Daggett, in a low voice. The dog followed. "My wife and children mustn't see you take him. They'd squall their eyes out. I'm sellin' him, my friend, because I've got to—because I need the money. You see! Otherwise your common council couldn't raise enough to buy him. Tie a string around his neck—he's as gentle as a lamb—call him Spot, and, after we're out of sight, lead him home and

feed him. And, my friend, treat him good. He's the best bird-dog you ever shot over."

The man wrote out a check, which the grocer cashed. Daggett pocketed the money, patted the dog on the head, and turned guiltily away from the beseeching brown eyes.

The children, lying inside the canvas, out of the hot sun, did not miss their four-footed playfellow until supper-time. Then Daggett confessed, and bowed his head before the storm of grief that burst. It was only after the young ones had sobbed themselves to sleep that Mrs. Daggett said, sympathetically, "I reckon it hurt you more than it did them, Rufus."

The next day they had butter on their bread again, but it had been purchased at too heavy an outlay of the heart's coin to be enjoyable; and when little Bobbie said with a whimper, "I'd thooner have Spot than butter," he voiced the family's sentiments.

But even the sacrifice of their pet could not long keep their spirits down, now that home was drawing near and they had the wherewithal to keep on going. The towns they passed through were becoming familiar to Daggett, by

name at least, and looked like Indiana towns, he fancied. As the wagon rumbled across the muddy Little Wabash, with its pond-lilies and willow thickets, Daggett cried out, boyishly: "By jings! it's a picture on a small scale of the old 'Bash herself; and I'll bet a cooky that if I had a hook and line I could ketch a catfish down there in three minutes!"

But when he crossed the Wabash itself, two days later, his emotions were too deep for frivolous expression. In that stream was water from Beecher's Run, and Beecher's Run crossed his old farm! How well he understood the silent tears which were coursing down Lucy's cheeks! And, oh, the rustle of that bottom-land corn! It came to his ears like some forgotten lullaby of childhood; and when a wood-pewee called pensively from a sycamore, the man lifted an illuminated face toward the little embodied voice and murmured, "God's country—old Indiana—at last!"

The prairie-schooner creaked into Emerald Grove after dark on a moonlight night. In their anxiety to reach the town they had decided not to halt for supper at the usual hour, Daggett

promising the children if they would wait that they should eat in a restaurant. They were now jubilant over this novel prospect. But the parents were quiet. The realization of their dream was too near at hand. Their old home lay but three miles away!

Emerald Grove! It was here that Lucy had bought her wedding-gown, and here that Daggett had bought his wedding suit. It was here that their childish eyes had first grown round with wonder at sight of a store, street-lamps, and a telephone. It was the promise of a trip to this town, on Saturday afternoon, that used to hold them faithful to their chores all week long. It was here the old doctor lived who had ushered them and their children into the world.

The town looked natural; but Daggett was surprised, and a little disappointed, at the number of new houses which had gone up. In his heart he was jealous of any change which had taken place in his absence. He wanted to come back to the Emerald Grove that he had left—a somnolent old town whose population had been at a standstill for a quarter of a century.

There were a number of new stores, too; and the restaurant to which Daggett took the family for supper had

been improved and enlarged until he hardly recognized the place. It had also changed hands, so that he was denied the pleasure of shaking hands with Elihu James, the former proprietor. As he ate he watched the door for a familiar face, which he was hungrier for than the viands on his plate; but he could recall the name of none of the men who dropped in for a cigar. Emerald Grove *had* changed!

After supper they drove around to Joinville Haines's house. At least one of the hearts in the wagon fluttered as Daggett passed up the flower-bordered, brick walk to the old-fashioned dwelling. So much depended on Joinville Haines and his loyalty to an old friend! Then, in an ominously short time, Lucy heard her husband coming down the walk again. Trouble was in his footfalls.

"Joinville don't live here no more," said he, in a puzzled manner. "He's gone and built him a new house, the woman said. Don't it beat you that he would give the old family home the shake?"

His tone was almost an aggrieved one. During the weeks on the road he had so often stood, in imagination, on the steps of this house, and seen Joinville Haines open the door and start at the apparition

of his old friend. Therefore, a strange woman answering his ring had stunned him. But this shock was small compared with the one he received when, following the woman's directions, he drove to a plot of ground that used to be rank with dog-fennel and jimson-weed and found a great, three-storied, granite mansion, with plate-glass windows, statuary in the yard, and a gravelled driveway and porte-cochère, all jealously guarded by an aristocratic ten-foot iron fence.

"This — this can't be Joinville's, Lucy!" he faltered.

But it was, so a white-capped maid informed him at the massive front door. Mr. Haines was not at home, she added, and would not be until the following day. Would he leave his card? Daggett shook his head and retreated in confusion. His card! He had never owned a card in his life, and the Joinville Haines he used to know never had, either.

"If we've got to camp again to-night, Rufus, let's drive out by the old place," pleaded Lucy, timidly. This great house, somehow, had frightened her. "I feel as if I'd sleep better out there. And I can't wait any longer to see it."

They were soon on the old familiar road, over which Daggett had hauled so

many wagon-loads of corn and hogs and apples. They passed the long row of Lombardy poplars in front of Newton Bryson's, and crossed first Haymeadow Creek and then Possum Fork. From a distance they recognized in the moonlight the thicket of "silver maples" that had sprung from the roots of the two hoary old trees in Si Morgan's front yard. Then came Dick Helm's, Lucian Smith's, Nimrod Binney's, and all the other old neighbors. No change here, and it was not long before the scent of new-mown hay, still lying in windrows, and the notes of the whippoorwills had smoothed away the disappointments and alarms of Emerald Grove.

Finally they rumbled across the little bridge over Beecher's Run—still patched with the plank that Daggett had placed there with his own hands. From the summit of the rise just beyond, their old home would lie in full view—the house, the barn, the well-house, and, if the moonlight were bright enough, the clump of spruces under which two little white stones stood at the head of two little graves.

Daggett halted the mules at the foot of the slope.

"Let's camp here to-night, Lucy," said

he, in a voice which sounded strange in his own ears. "We couldn't see much to-night, anyhow. And I'd sooner see it first by daylight. It'll look more natural."

So they camped there that night—camped, but did not sleep. All night long the woman lay in the wagon, listening to the frogs, and looking at the stars in the west—that west out of which they had fled as the children of Israel fled out of Egypt. And all night long the man under the wagon, out of the dew, lay with open eyes; and he too looked at the stars.

For some reason—the natural reaction following his high-strung anticipations, or the changes in Emerald Grove—he was uneasy. And though the little frogs trilled and the crickets chirped just as they always used to do, something seemed to be amiss with the old nocturnal quietude of the place. All through the night there came to him, he fancied, a low, distant, regular, mysterious sound which he was at a loss to explain. When he rose to his elbow and listened, it seemed to cease; and he finally persuaded himself that it was only a ringing in his ears from indigestion. He had eaten a pretty hearty supper.

The elders were up at the gray of dawn, while the children still slept; but it was not until the sun had fairly risen that they proceeded slowly up the little rise of ground. Lucy reached out and took her husband's hand. He felt her trembling; and there flashed before him a day in their childhood when both of them, barefooted, had tramped up this selfsame little hill. She was trembling then, too, for she had seen a snake in the blackberry bushes.

They reached the top of the rise, and lifted their eyes. Both suddenly grew rigid. Then Lucy gave a little cry. Daggett stared vacantly ahead.

There was no farm! There was no cottage — no barn — no vine-clad well-house! All had been swept from the face of the earth as if by the besom of destruction. In their place were long, low, ugly brick buildings, with tin roofs; great tanks; tall towers of structural steel; a huge brick chimney, from which jetty smoke rolled forth; several rows of newly painted laborers' quarters; a railroad track and cars.

"Oil!" broke out Daggett, hoarsely, at last. "They've struck oil!"

Lucy, swaying dizzily, grasped his arm for support.

"Where's the little graveyard?" she whispered.

"I—I can't jest make out, I'm so turned around," he answered.

But he was not turned around to that extent. He had seen at the first glance that the ugly boiler-house, with the smoky cloud clustering about its tall stack like some foul fungus, squatted squarely over the little God's-acre in which the dust of their dead ones lay. It gave him a feeling of suffocation.

As they stood in stunned silence, a carriage drawn by two spirited black horses, whose buckles glittered in the sunlight, rapidly approached. On the rear seat, behind a liveried coachman, sat Joinville Haines—a millionaire, but up and at work while most of his hired men still slept in the quarters below. In spite of his great house in Emerald Grove, and in spite of his fine equipage, he had changed little. He wore the same plain, ill-fitting clothes he had always worn, and beneath his squarely trimmed beard his shirt-front showed innocent of any cravat. He was only a little older, a little sadder, with deeper lines about his mouth.

At sight of the wayfarers, who, in their crushed mood, would have let him

pass unhailed, he ordered the driver to stop.

"How do, Rufus! How do, Lucy!" said he, with his old quiet cordiality. He stepped down and held out his hand to each, after a characteristic motion which reminded Lucy of the days when he used to run a meat-market and always wiped his hand on his apron before offering it to any one. "When'd you git back?"

"Last night," answered Daggett. "We camped yander. We just come up to see the old place."

"Hadn't you heard?"

Daggett shook his head. A peculiar light, akin to pity, flamed up in the rich man's eyes, and then died away.

"You find consid'able change, then."

"Joinville, we wanted to buy the old place back!" cried Lucy, swiftly.

Again that peculiar light in his eyes.

"Well, I guess you don't want it now, after I've sp'iled it for you. You wouldn't, leastways, if you'd had as much trouble with it as I have." He jerked his head toward his liveried coachman. "My wife makes me ride behind that monkey in red top-boots," he added, in a lowered voice. "But, Rufus, if you want a farm, I've got a hundred acres two

miles down the road—the old Barnum place. It's better land than this ever was, and you can have it on easy terms."

"How much down?" asked Daggett, with a harsh laugh. He seemed to be joking, in a ghastly way.

"Whatever you can pay," answered the millionaire, steadily.

Daggett drew a couple of silver dollars and some small change from his trousers pocket.

"There's my pile, Join—what's left of my bird-dog."

Haines studied the coins in the horny palm for a moment.

"You have a penny there. Pay me that down." He did not smile, but gravely accepted the copper, wrote out a receipt for it, and signed a name that was good for at least a million dollars. "You can take possession this morning—there's no one on the place. I'll drop in this afternoon, and we'll inventory the stock and machinery."

The man and the woman stood side by side, without speech, until the carriage had passed out of sight.

"He *didn't* forget," said Daggett, with glistening eyes.

Lucy's lips parted, but closed again, soundlessly.

The Gray Chieftain

BY CHARLES A. EASTMAN, M.D.

ON the westernmost verge of the Cedar Butte stood Haykinskah and his mate. They looked steadily toward the setting sun, over a landscape which up to that time had scarcely been viewed by man—the inner circle of the Bad Lands.

Cedar Butte guards the southeastern entrance of that wonderland, standing fully a thousand feet above the surrounding country, and nearly half a mile long by a quarter of a mile wide. The summit is a level, grassy plain, its edges heavily fringed with venerable cedars. To attempt the ascent of this butte is like trying to scale the walls of Babylon, for its sides are high and all but inaccessible. Near the top there are hanging lands or terraces and innumerable precipitous points, with here and there deep

chimneys or abysses in the solid rock. There are many hidden recesses, and more than one secret entrance to this ancient castle of the Gray Chieftain and his ancestors, but to assail it successfully required more than common skill and spirit.

Many a coyote had gone up as high as the second leaping bridge, and there abandoned the attempt. Old Grizzly had once or twice begun the ascent with doubt and misgiving, but soon discovered his mistake, and made clumsy haste to descend before he should tumble into an abyss from which no one ever returns. Only Igmutanka, the mountain-lion, had achieved the summit, and at every ascent he had been well repaid; yet even he seldom chose to risk such a climb, when there were many fine hunting-grounds in safer neighborhoods.

So it was that Cedar Butte had been the peaceful home of the Big Spoonhorns for untold ages. To be sure, some of the younger and more adventurous members of the clan would depart from time to time to found new families, but the wiser and more conservative were content to remain in their stronghold. There stood the two patriarchs, looking down complacently upon the herds of buffalo,

antelope, and elks that peopled the lower plains. While the red sun hovered over the western hills, a coyote upon a near-by eminence gave his accustomed call to his mate. This served as a signal to all the wild hunters of the plains to set up their inharmonious evening serenade, to which the herbivorous kindred paid but little attention. The phlegmatic Spoonhorn pair listened to it all with a fine air of indifference, like that of one who sits upon his own balcony, superior to the passing noises of the street.

It was a charming moonlight night upon the cedar-fringed plain, and there the old chief presently joined the others in feast and play. His mate sought out a secret resting-place. She followed the next gulch, which was a perfect labyrinth of caves and pockets, and after leaping two chasms she reached her favorite spot. Here the gulch made a square turn, affording a fine view of the country through a windowlike opening. Above and below this were perpendicular walls, and at the bottom a small cavity —the washout made by a root of a pine which had long since fallen. To this led a narrow terrace—so narrow that man or beast would stop and hesitate long before making the venture. The place was

her own by right of daring and discovery, and the mother's instinct had brought her here to-night.

In a little while relief came, and the ewe stood over a new-born lamb, licking tenderly the damp, silky coat of hair, and trimming the little hoofs of their cartilaginous points. The world was quiet now, and those whose business it was to hunt or feed at night must do so in silence, for such is the law of the plains. The wearied mother slept in peace.

The sun was well above the butte when she awoke, although it was cool and shadowy still in her concealed abode. She gave suck to the lamb, and caressed it for some time before she reluctantly prepared its cradle according to the custom of her people. She made a little pocket in the floor of the cave and gently put the baby in. Then she covered him all up, save the nose and eyes, with dry soil. She put her nose to his little sensitive ear and breathed into it warm love and caution, and he felt and understood that he must keep his eyes closed and breathe gently, lest bear or wolf or man should catch his big eyes or hear his breathing if they should find her trail. Again she put her warm, loving nose to his eyes,

she patted a little more earth on his body and smoothed it off. The tachinchana closed his eyes in obedience, and she left him for the plain above, in search of food and sunlight.

At a little before dawn two wild hunters left their camp and set out for the Cedar Butte. Their movements were marked by unusual care and secrecy. Presently they hid their ponies in a deep ravine and groped their way up through the difficult Bad Lands, now and then pausing to listen. The two were close friends and rival hunters of their tribe.

"I think, friend, you have mistaken the haunts of the Spoonhorn," remarked Grayfoot, as the pair came out upon one of the lower terraces. He said this rather to test his friend, for it was their habit thus to criticise and question one another's judgment, in order to extract from each other fresh observations. What the one did not know about the habits of the animals they hunted in common, the other could usually supply.

"This is his home. I know it," replied Wahye. "And in this thing the animals are much like ourselves. They will not leave an old haunt unless forced to do so, either by lack of food or overwhelming danger."

They had already passed on to the next terrace and leaped a deep chasm to gain the opposite side of the butte, when Grayfoot suddenly whispered, "Inajin!" (Stop!). Both men listened attentively. "Tap, tap, tap," an almost metallic sound came to them from around the perpendicular wall of rock.

"He is chipping his horns," exclaimed the hunter, overjoyed to surprise the chieftain at this his secret occupation. "Poor beast! they are now too long for him, so that he cannot reach the short grass to feed. Some of them die starving, when they have not the strength to do the hard bucking against the rock to shorten their horns. He chooses this time, when he thinks no one will hear him, and he even leaves his own clan when it is necessary for him to do this. Come, let us crawl upon him unawares!"

They proceeded cautiously and with catlike steps around the next projection, and stood upon a narrow strip of slanting terrace. At short intervals the pounding noise continued, but, strain their eyes as they might, they could see nothing. Yet they knew that a few paces from them, in the darkness, the old chief was painfully driving his massive horns against the solid rock. So they lay

flat upon the ground under a dead cedar, whose trunk and the color of the scanty soil resembled their clothing, and on their heads they had stuck some bunches of sage-bush, to conceal them from the eyes of the Spoonhorn.

With the first gray of the approaching dawn the two hunters looked eagerly about them. There, in all his majesty, heightened by the wild grandeur of his surroundings, stood the Gray Chieftain of the Cedar Butte! He had no thought of being observed at that hour. Entirely unsuspicious of danger, he stood alone upon a pedestal-like terrace, from which vantage-point it was his wont to survey the surrounding country every morning. If the secret must be told, he had done so for years, ever since he became the head chief of the Cedar Butte clan.

It is the custom of their tribe that when a ram attains the age of five years he is entitled to a clan of his own. He must thereafter defend his right and supremacy against all comers. His experience and knowledge are the guide of his clan. In view of all this, the Gray Chieftain had been very thorough in his observations. There was not an object anywhere near the shape of bear, wolf, or man for miles around his king-

dom upon Hanta Pahah that was not noted, as well as the relative positions of rocks and conspicuous trees.

The best time for Haykinskah to make his daily observations is at sunrise and sunset, when the air is usually clear and objects appear distinct. Between these times the clan feed and settle down to chew their cud and sleep; yet some are always on the alert to catch a passing stranger within their field of observation. But the old chief Spoonhorn pays very little attention. He may be nestled in a gulch just big enough to hold him, either sound asleep or leisurely chewing his cud. The younger members of the clan take their position upon the upper terraces of the great and almost inaccessible butte, under the shade of its projecting rocks, after a whole night's feasting and play upon the plain.

As Spoonhorn stood motionless, looking away off toward the distant hills, the plain below appeared from this elevated point very smooth and sheetlike, and every moving object a mere speck. His form and color were not very different from the dirty gray rocks and clay of the butte.

Wahye broke the silence: "I know of no animal that stands so long without

movement, unless it is the turtle. I think he is the largest ram I have ever seen."

"I am sure he did not chip where he stands now," remarked Grayfoot. "This chipping-place is a monastery to the priests of the Spoonhorn tribe. It is their medicine-man's lodge. I have more than once approached the spot, but could never find the secret entrance."

"Shall I shoot him now?" whispered his partner in the chase.

"No, do not do it. He is a real chief. He looks mysterious and noble. Let us learn to know him better. Besides, if we kill him we will never see him again. Look; he will fall to that deep gulch ten trees' length below, where no one can get at him."

As Grayfoot spoke, the animal shifted his position, facing them squarely. The two men closed their eyes and wrinkled their motionless faces into the semblance of two lifeless mummies. The old sage of the mountains was apparently deceived; but after a few moments he got down from his lofty position and disappeared around a point of rock.

"I never care to shoot an animal while he is giving me a chance to know his ways," explained Grayfoot. "We have plenty of buffalo meat. We are not hun-

gry. 'All we want is spoons. We can get one or two sheep by and by, if we have more wit than they."

To this speech Wahye agreed, for his curiosity was now fully aroused by Grayfoot's view, although he had never before thought of it in that way. It had always been the desire for meat that had chiefly moved him in the matter of the hunt.

Having readjusted their sage wigs, the hunters made the circuit of the abyss that divided them from the ram, and as they looked for his trail, they noticed the tracks of a large ewe leading down toward the inaccessible gulches.

"Ah! she has some secret down there. She never leaves her clan like this, unless it is to steal away for a personal affair of her own."

So saying, Grayfoot and his fellow tracked the ewe's footprint along the verge of a deep gulch with much trouble and patience. The hunter's curiosity and a strong desire to know her secret impelled the former to lead the way.

"What will be our profit if one slips and goes down into the gulch, never to be seen again?" remarked Wahye, as they approached a leaping-place. The chasm below was of a great depth and dark. "It is not wise for us to follow

farther; this ewe has no horns that can be made into spoons."

"Come, friend, it is when one is doubting that mishaps are apt to occur," urged his companion.

"Koda, heyu yo!" exclaimed Wahye the next moment in distress.

"Hehehe, koda! hold fast!" cried the other.

Wahye's moccasined foot had slipped on the narrow trail, and in the twinkling of an eye he had almost gone down a precipice of a hundred feet; but by a desperate launch forward he caught the bough of an overhanging cedar and swung by his hands over the abyss.

Quickly Grayfoot pulled both their bows from the quivers. He first tied himself to the trunk of the cedar with his packing-strap, which always hung from his belt. Then he held both the bows toward his friend, who, not without difficulty, changed his hold from the cedar bough to the bows. After a short but determined effort the two men stood side by side once more upon the narrow foothold of the terrace. Without a word they followed the ewe's track to the cave.

Here she had lain last night! Both men began to search for other marks, but they found not so much as a sign

of scratching anywhere. They examined the ground closely, but without success. All at once a faint "ba-a-a" came from almost under their feet. They saw a puff of smokelike dust as the little creature called for its mother. It had felt the footsteps of the hunters, and mistaken them for those of its own folk.

Wahye hastily dug into the place with his hands and found the soil loose. Soon he uncovered the little lamb. "Ba-a-a," it cried again, and quick as a flash the ewe appeared, stamping the ground in wrath.

Wahye seized an arrow and fitted it to the string, but his companion checked him. "No, no, my friend. It is not the skin or meat that we are looking for. We want horn for ladles and spoons. The mother is right. We must let her babe alone."

The wild hunters silently retreated, and the ewe ran swiftly to the spot and took her lamb away.

"So it is," said Grayfoot, after a long silence, "all the tribes of earth have some common feeling. I believe they are people as much as we are. The Great Mystery has made them what they are. Although they do not speak our tongue, we seem to understand their thought.

It is not right to take the life of any of them unless necessity compels us to do so.

"You know," he continued, "the ewe conceals her lamb in this way until she has trained it to escape from its enemies by leaping up or down from terrace to terrace. I have seen her teaching the yearlings and two-year-olds to dive down the face of a cliff which was fully twice the height of a man. They strike on the head and the two forefeet. The ram falls largely upon his horns, which are curved in such a way as to protect them from injury. The body rebounds slightly, and they get upon their feet as easily as if they had struck a pillow. At first the yearlings hesitate and almost lose their balance, but the mother makes them repeat the performance until they have accomplished it to her satisfaction.

"They are then trained to leap chasms on all fours, and finally the upward jump, which is a more difficult feat. If the height is not great they can clear it neatly, but if it is too high for that, they will catch the rocky ledge with their forefeet and pull themselves up like a man.

"In assisting their young to gain upper terraces they show much ingenuity. I once saw them make a ladder of their

bodies. The biggest ram stood braced against the steep wall as high as his body could reach, head placed between his fore-feet, while the next biggest one rode his hind parts, and so on until the little ones could walk upon their broad backs to the top. We know that all animals make their young ones practise such feats as are necessary to their safety and advantage, and thus it is that these people are so well fitted to their peculiar mode of life.

"How often we are outwitted by the animals we hunt! The Great Mystery gives them this chance to save their lives by eluding the hunter, when they have no weapons of defence. The ewe has seen us, and she has doubtless warned all the clan of danger."

But there was one that she did not see! When the old chief left his clan to go to the secret place for chipping his horns, the place where many a past monarch of the Bad Lands has performed that painful operation, he did not intend to rejoin them immediately. It was customary with him at that time to seek solitude and sleep.

The two hunters found and carefully examined the tracks of the fleeing clan. The old ram was not among them. As

they followed the trail along the terrace they came to a leaping-place which did not appear to be generally used. Grayfoot stopped and kneeled down to scrutinize the ground below. "Ho!" he exclaimed, "the old chief has gone down this trail, but has not returned. He is lying down near his chipping-place, if there is no other outlet from there."

Both leaped to the next terrace below, and followed the secret pass into a rocky amphitheatre, opening out from the terrace upon which they had first seen the old ram. Here he lay asleep.

Wahye pulled an arrow from his quiver.

"Yes," said his friend, "shoot now!

The old chief awoke to behold the most dreaded hunter—man—upon the very threshold of his sanctuary! Wildly he sprang upward to gain the top of the cliff. But Wahye was expert and quick in the use of his weapon. He had sent into his side a shaft that was deadly. The monarch's forehoofs caught the edge—he struggled bravely for a moment, then fell limply to the floor below.

"He is dead. My friend, the noblest of chiefs is dead!" exclaimed Grayfoot as he stood over him, in great admiration and respect for the Gray Chieftain.

The Inn of San Jacinto

BY ZOE DANA UNDERHILL

YOU ask me if I believe in ghosts. Of course I do. I believe in them because I have felt one. It was in a ruin, too, the correct place for ghosts; but not exactly in the right kind of ruin, for there was nothing imposing or weird about it; it was a dusty, tumble-down adobe shanty in New Mexico.

Do you remember Harry Felters—what great promise he gave as a young artist, and how he never came to anything? He and I were great chums at the Art School, and afterwards we fell into the way of going on sketching tours together. He was a nice fellow, quick-tempered, but very good-natured too, and it would have been hard to find a jollier companion. I was delighted one autumn when he proposed we should make a little Western excursion together; he wanted to get some of the atmospheric effects on the high plains. We started in September, bought ourselves a couple of broncos

when we reached the country we wanted, and started off on the trail which ran near the railroad. We had splendid weather, took all the time we wanted, and got a lot of first-rate things; but Felters was looking forward all the time to stopping at a little Mexican village—San Jacinto, the name was—which lay some distance off the main trail, but which he had heard was the rarest place. A friend of his had been there a couple of years before, but had only been able to stay a day or so. He reported a tolerable inn, and we planned to stop for several weeks, making excursions into the surrounding country, and getting what we were particularly anxious for—some character sketches of the natives. We had the pleasantest anticipations of our time there.

The day before we expected to reach San Jacinto we struck off on to a side trail across the hills. We learned afterwards that there was more danger in undertaking this lonely journey than we had any idea of at the time, but we came to no harm. We slept out that night, and late the next afternoon we came in sight of the village, perched half-way up a long, sloping mesa. We reached it as the sun was setting. There was but a

single street running between low adobe huts, but, to our surprise, this street was thronged with Mexicans and Indians in holiday costumes—fierce, agile-looking fellows in thumping hats, and slim girls with mantillas over their heads.

We mustered our slender stock of Spanish, and inquired of the first group we met the reason of the crowd. We found some local fair was in progress, and it was not only the inhabitants of San Jacinto we beheld, but of all the settlements for fifty miles around. Harry, in the seventh heaven of delight, was gaping at all the wrinkled old men and dark-eyed girls, in their picturesque array, but I was hungry, and not willing to waste time on the picturesque just then, so I hauled him along, protesting and turning round all the time, towards what had been pointed out to us as the inn we were in search of. It stood quite at the other end of the street, and looked bigger and more imposing than the rest of the houses, being newly painted a fine brick-color.

"Here we are at last, and a good thing too," said I, as the owner of the house came bustling out to receive us. He hurried us into a long, crowded room, and set a couple of cooling drinks before us

in enormous glasses before we had time to speak, chattering all the time with great civility. But as soon as we began to talk of rooms he sang a different tune.

"Ah, señores," he cried, in a despairing tone, "that is an impossibility, quite an impossibility. Every inch of room in the house is taken—is crowded, I may say. As soon as they are done drinking and singing we put mattresses down on the floor of the eating-room here; and I will try my best to find a corner for a mattress for the two noble gentlemen. Mattresses in plenty I have, but no space to spread them, unfortunately."

"Well, well," broke in Harry, "it isn't mattresses we want. It's a room to ourselves to sleep in. Surely we can find something at some of the neighbors'. We won't grumble if it's a little one."

But the landlord shook his head. "No, no," he reiterated; "there isn't an empty space anywhere in the village big enough to hold a canary-bird. Every house is full."

"But you must have some little corner or cupboard you could put us in. Your own room, for instance. If we pay you well, couldn't you move out of that for a night or two, just till this fair is over?"

The man shrugged his shoulders. "I haven't slept in my own room for three nights. Seven women have it," he said. "I take one of the benches down here."

"Very well," cried Harry, who was getting out of temper; "then we will simply go on without stopping. We meant to spend several weeks here, but of course if you haven't accommodations—" And he turned and picked up his saddle-bags from the bench where he had flung them.

"Oh, come, now, Harry," said I, "we don't want to leave the moment we get here. For a few nights we can certainly stand it, and then it will quiet down again."

"Yes, yes," cried the landlord, evidently much impressed to hear of the long stay we had intended, and anxious to detain us if promises would do it; "oh yes, yes! By the end of the week the fair is over, and then you can have splendid rooms—as many rooms as you like."

But as you know, Harry was always a pig-headed fellow. He buckled his bags tight.

"No," said he; "I'm not going to sleep in any such mess as this. If we can't have rooms to ourselves, we go on to-night. That's all about it."

The landlord wrung his hands. "Ah," he cried, "what a shame! what a shame! To have the gentlemen leave my house!" Then I saw a sly gleam come into his eye. "Ah," he cried, "I have it! I have it! If the gentlemen would only be satisfied. Do you mind, perhaps, if you sleep in a very old room? Oh, very, very old!"

"No, no!" we interposed, in a breath.

"But it is very old," he went on, looking at us narrowly, "and there is but the one room for the two."

"That is nothing," we cried. "We won't mind that in the least, as long as we don't have to sleep on the floor with strangers."

"And even there," he went on, "I fear you would have to occupy the same bed; there is but one bedstead in the room. To be sure," he said, reflectively, "one of you might have a mattress on the floor even there, but it would be very cold, I fear. The floor is of stone, and the dampness—"

"Oh, never mind," we interrupted; "for three or four nights it won't matter, as long as we can have the room to ourselves."

"Certainly, certainly," he reiterated, "to yourselves. I should not think of

putting any one else in the room of the two noble gentlemen. Sit down, sit down, and make yourselves easy. I will send my niece to make ready for you. You must not expect too much, gentlemen. It is in the old part of the house that has gone to ruin a good deal; that is why I never thought of it before. But this one room is strongly built. It is safe enough; you need have no fear of roof or walls. But it is dusty; I must have it swept." And so talking on, half to himself and half to us, he filled our glasses again, and got himself out of the room. Presently we heard his voice outside calling, "Julita! Julita!" and then a long and rather vehement whispered conversation was carried on not far from the window.

It was an hour or more, and we had finished our supper, before he returned to show us to our apartment. We found it was in a deserted building whose presence we had not even suspected from the front of the house. It lay far to the back and one side, and was, our host told us, the old original inn, which had been built by his great-uncle several times removed, and had fallen too much out of repair to use. But the room to which he led us was still in tolerable preservation, a queer old

place, with walls and floor of rough stone, and lighted by a small grated window high up at one side. They had set in a few odd pieces of furniture for us, and a big four-post bedstead, which looked as old as the room, was piled high with an enormous feather-bed. For the bedstead our host apologized profusely. Not to be able to furnish us at least with separate sleeping accommodations weighed heavily on his spirits. But what could he do? It was to be regarded as good-fortune that the old bedstead had not long since been brought into the house and given to earlier comers. Its age and weight were the sole reasons it was still at our disposal. For the feather-bed he did not think it necessary to apologize, though that was certainly what seemed most formidable to us. However, we were pleased enough to get anything to ourselves, and told him so.

We went back to the big hall, and sat there awhile smoking and watching the queer collection of humanity it held, but we were both tired with our ride, and presently asked the landlord for our candles. He brought them, one for each, and each with a little box of Swedish matches beside it on the candlestick. But he was a long time lighting them,

snuffed them out once or twice, and finally said, with a curious air of gravity for so slight a speech:

"The gentlemen see that our candles are not easy to light. Might I beg of them to leave the night-light burning in their chamber?"

"Night-light?" cried Harry, brusquely. "Oh no, we don't want a night-light. There is nothing the matter with those candles. It's only the clumsy way you snuffed them." And with the word he drew a match from his pocket, lit it quickly, and in a moment had the candle burning clearly.

The landlord looked perturbed. "See! see!" he cried. "Once the candle may light quickly, and another time it may not. The little light will not disturb you. I *beg* the gentlemen will leave it burning. There will be no extra charge—none whatever." And he looked at us anxiously.

"Oh, nonsense!" said Harry, turning away with his candle.

But the landlord must have thought I was of a more accommodating disposition, for now he caught me by the coat sleeve. "I beg, I beg," he repeated; and, tired of his persistence, I answered, carelessly, "Oh, all right; I won't put it out,"

and left before he had time to say anything more.

But we were not yet free from importunities about our lights, for as we passed the kitchen his fat old wife, who superintended the cooking for her husband's guests, waddled towards us.

"Candles! candles!" she panted. "Oh, they're no good. You'll blow them out before you think twice. But look out not to disturb the little night-light Julita set up in the niche. That 'll give you light enough to see by all night."

"Good Lord! what do we want to see for? The night's made for sleeping," cried Harry, roughly, and dragged me through the kitchen like a whirlwind, while behind us we still heard the wheezing voice of the old woman discoursing on the insufficiency of candles and the superior advantages of Julita's oil-taper.

We had not done with the advocates of the night-light even yet. As we made our way through the dusty passage, stumbling over the broken slabs of stone which formed its floor, we encountered Julita herself, pale and trembling, and regarding with anxious fear the lantern which she held in her hand. She jumped aside with a scream when she caught

sight of us, then laid her hand on her heart with a look of relief.

"Oh, blessed saints, it is the gentlemen!" she exclaimed. "I have just been to look after the light in your room myself." She spoke as one conscious of having bestowed an inestimable favor. "It is burning brightly. The little oil-lamp is high up in the niche of the wall; nothing can overturn it. The oil is of the best. It will burn all night—"

"Oh, come!" cried Harry, who by this time had entirely lost his temper. "Who wants your infernal lamp! For Heaven's sake, let us have a little peace and darkness."

"Ah, no, no!" cried the girl, recoiling as if he had struck her—"not darkness! The gracious gentleman did not think of what he was saying. Oh, sir," laying her hand on my arm as Harry pushed angrily past her, "you surely would not put out the light? You will surely let it burn all night?" and she looked at me as desperately as if she were imploring me not to cut my throat. Her eyes were full of tears. I felt sorry for such distress, even while I was annoyed by these continuous appeals from a singularly light-loving populace, and answered, hastily:

"Oh, certainly, certainly, my good

girl." Slipping past her, I contrived to get into the room and shut the door before she could speak again.

Harry came up and locked it.

"Confound them!" he said; "what is the matter with them all? We have matches, I hope. Why should they take such a particularly fervent interest in our lamp?" and he laid his match-box on the chair at the head of the ponderous bedstead, beside the candle which he had just extinguished.

Then he reached up and blew out the little flame in the niche above our heads.

"There!" said he; "I hope that's done with for to-night, anyway."

"Oh, Harry," I remonstrated, "I told the girl I wouldn't put it out."

"Well, you haven't, have you?" he rejoined, roughly. "Now you'd better not talk any more of that intolerable nonsense, or I shall get into a temper. Put out your own light when you're ready to go to sleep, and that's the end of it. I'm tired to death."

It wasn't five minutes before he had tumbled into the wide bed, nor five more before he was asleep. I felt wakeful, and made my preparations in a more leisurely way, but presently I too stretched out my weary limbs on the soft feathers.

The little window with its iron bars stood diagonally across from the foot of the bed, and as I blew out my candle and sank back on the pillow my eyes fell on the dim gray square. I seemed to see some vague black form pass between me and it. My heart gave a sudden throb, and I started to raise myself; but before I had done so I felt in the darkness something fly at my throat. My hands went up instinctively, and grasped the thick cold fingers which were clutching me so tightly that it was impossible to breathe. The terror of death fell upon me, and with all my strength I tore at the invisible hands which were squeezing my life out, but I could no more move them than I could have moved the solid rock. I was powerless to make a sound. I set my head and shoulders against the bulk which pressed upon me and tried to push it back, but vainly, though in my agony I writhed and twisted like a snake. I felt that I was growing faint, my head rang, and my senses were faltering, when in my convulsive movements my foot touched Harry's warm and sleeping body. I gathered myself together, and struck out with all the strength I had left. I felt him roll over, and then that he was sitting up in bed. It was like heaven to

know that he was beside me and roused, but even then I thought to myself there was little chance of his coming to my rescue in time.

Harry called to me once or twice, and then I felt his hand laid on my heaving shoulder. The next moment I heard him jump out of bed, and it seemed not a second before the flare of a candle lit up the room. The pressure was gone from my throat. I drew in the air again and yet again, but was still too exhausted and bewildered to know anything but that the struggle was over, and I was once more drawing the blessed breath of life.

"Good gracious! What's the matter with you?" I heard Harry say; but I only moaned.

"Here, wake up!" he cried, and shook me by the shoulder. I lifted myself on one elbow, and looked around with a shudder. There was nothing in sight but Harry, who was looking at me sharply. I put my hand to my throat; it was bruised and sore to the touch.

"Oh, Harry," I panted, "something awful has happened!"

"Something awful!" he repeated. "You've had an awful nightmare, that's what's the matter—and you aren't awake yet, either. Shake yourself together, man,

can't you? You look as if you'd seen a ghost. I declare your eyes are all bloodshot. Oh, nonsense!" as I slipped back on the pillow, with a sigh. "Come, brace up, and have a little style about you."

"Oh, Harry," I reiterated, "there has been something awful. It's no nightmare. I wasn't asleep. The minute the light was out some one—something—came at my throat. In another moment I should have been strangled, if you hadn't waked."

"Why, I didn't do anything, except jump out of bed when you kicked me. You needn't thank me for anything more than waking you up—and that isn't half done yet."

"Oh, I'm awake enough!" I cried.

"Well, then," said he, "that's all there is to be said about it. "We'll blow out the light and try our hand at sleeping again," and as he spoke he bent over the candle to extinguish it; but I caught him and pulled him away quickly.

"No, no!" I shouted, filled with uncontrollable terror; "let it burn. Light the little night-lamp, won't you? I've had such a scare I'm afraid to be left in the dark."

"All right," he answered, with a laugh; "we'll keep the promise to Julita

the rest of the night, anyway. I suppose it was your uneasy conscience wouldn't let you rest."

In a few moments more he was again sound asleep beside me, but my fears were not so easily quieted. A hundred imaginary noises made me start up to peer into the distant corners of the room, or look up at the black square of the window; and at every little quiver of the tiny flame burning in the niche my heart jumped. I lay awake till the dawn came in at the grated casement, and then fell asleep, utterly worn out.

Harry was moving about the room, humming a song, when I woke. The bright sun was shining through the bars of the window. I felt ashamed of myself, and when he caught my eye he broke into a roar of laughter.

"Well, I say," he shouted, "I hope you've managed to pluck up a little spirit this morning. I never saw a man scared so blue in my life. For Heaven's sake, tell us what you were dreaming about. A whole menagerie, I should say. How's your neck this morning?" And he went off into a fresh peal of laughter.

"Well, laugh if you like," said I; "it was awful. I can't imagine how I came to get into such a state. Good Heavens!

I can't bear to think of it even now." I paused a moment, for as the memory of the night's grisly phantom came back clearly, an intolerable shiver of fear went through me. "Besides," I went on, "my neck is all sore still. I believe you can see the bruises."

"By Jove!" he said, coming up and looking at me closely. "By Jove!" he repeated, touching my throat gingerly with the tips of his fingers. "That's the most curious thing I ever saw! You're all black and blue! How *did* you do it?"

"That's more than I know," said I, "unless the thing that came at me last night did it." And then I told him every detail of my curious experience of the night. As I told it my own faith in its reality grew, and I could see that he was impressed with the same feeling; but when I came to the end he shook himself, seemed to gather his routed forces, and gave an incredulous laugh again.

"Well," he said, looking down at me from his great height—"well, that certainly is a queer story. And you think all that could go on with me asleep right beside you and me not know it? Eh? Oh, nonsense! You had a nightmare, of course, and that's what made you kick

out so. My shins are as black and blue as your neck."

"Yes, and what made my neck black and blue?" I broke in. "Do you suppose you had the nightmare too, and were trying to twist it?"

"No, no! Of course not," said he. "You must have twisted your own fingers around it in your sleep somehow. That isn't so unlikely as that a phantom tried to throttle you." And he gave anew a boisterous laugh.

There was no use in arguing with him; and besides, I had no tenable ground for argument. I could not bring myself to believe in his explanation; but still less could I, in the full light of reason and glare of day, believe in the unseen foe who had made the darkness of night so horrible. With an effort I succeeded in dismissing the whole thing from my mind, and dressed to join Harry in the sketching excursions which we had planned the day before. Julita was in the passage as we went through to breakfast. She did not seem busy about anything, and by her attitude I judged she had been watching our door. At any rate, as we opened it her face was pale and troubled, but a moment later broke into smiles as she saw us both emerge

from the room. The landlord, too, greeted us with fervor, and served us an excellent breakfast, which his fat wife came in to watch us eat. Indeed, every one about the inn seemed to take an interest in us, and gathered in the doorways to look at us. This we attributed to the fact that we were, in a way, foreigners; and they were all so good-natured about it, breaking out into smiles and expressions of satisfaction whenever we looked their way, that we did not mind.

We had a successful day of it, gathering in a collection of queer and picturesque figures, and didn't get back till dark. I had felt strangely tired all day, and was glad to yield to Harry's suggestion that we should go early to bed. He stuck his sketches all around, and gloated over them in the dim illumination of the candles; but I was overcome with sleep, and tumbled into bed as quickly as I could.

"I'll get on the other side, Harry," I said, "if you aren't ready to come yet."

"All right, old man," said he, walking back and forth before his pictures. "I'm not ready yet. I hope this light won't keep you awake."

"On the contrary," said I, "I much prefer it. I can't forget my bad dreams

so quickly. Do leave the little night-light burning, Harry, like a good fellow."

"All right," he answered; and in a moment I was asleep.

I don't know how long afterwards it was that I was awakened abruptly by being pushed almost out of bed. I was so sound asleep that I could not collect my thoughts all at once, and lay for a moment trying to rouse myself, when the blow was violently repeated, and then I became aware that Harry was writhing and beating his arms about at my side. In a sudden spasm of terror I sprang out of bed, ran round to the other side where the matches were, and struck the whole bunch as I gathered them in my hand. They flared up, and shivering with fright, I moved to the bedside. There lay Harry, his eyes staring wide with horror, and drawing occasionally a long moaning breath. I knew well enough what it was, and wasted no time on questions, but hurried to light the candle before the matches should go out. Then, for safety, I also reached up and kindled the little taper, which Harry had evidently extinguished, as the oil in the glass was scarcely consumed. Afterwards I turned back to Harry, drew the covers away to give him air, carried the light to the foot

of the bed, where his eyes could rest upon it, and draw from it the reassurance that I knew nothing else could give, and softly chafed his nerveless hands. Presently I had the satisfaction of seeing the wild and wandering look die out of his face and a certain composure return to it. He was evidently getting possession of his faculties.

"Well, Harry," I said, when I saw this, "I suppose you have had the nightmare?"

A sickly smile drew up the corners of his mouth.

"Confound you," he murmured, "I was just thinking that was the first thing you would say, and now you've said it! Good Heavens!" he cried, in a louder tone, raising himself in bed and peering around the room, "I can't believe the hideous thing is gone. Are you sure it isn't in one of the corners yet? I tell you I had a narrow squeak for my life. I wouldn't care to come so near death again in a hurry. If that last kick hadn't routed you out I knew I should never have strength enough for another. Oh, what terror!" The wild look came back as he talked; he raised his hand and felt of his throat, which, from where I stood, I could see was red and swollen.

"It is hideous," said I. "You surely must know now it was no nightmare." He nodded, and gave again a quick, frightened look about. I went on:

"It—it is something that only comes in the dark. It cannot be a real thing, for it is gone with the first ray of light. It is real enough to strangle a man, though. Heavens, Harry, suppose either of us had slept here alone!" We both shuddered.

After a little while Harry quieted down, but there was very little sleep for either of us that night. We lighted everything within reach. I had a travelling lamp with me, and Harry hauled out of his bag one of those little pocket-lanterns that his sister had packed in just as he was leaving home. He said he laughed at her when she did it, but we were glad enough to see it now. We dozed and woke at intervals, always reassured to see our improvised illumination when we unclosed our eyes. Everything was still as the grave, and except for our excited nerves we might have rested in peace the whole night through. When daylight came we both gave a sigh of relief, and turning over, fell into a sleep so heavy that we never stirred

until we were wakened by a tremendous thumping at the door.

"For the love of God," we heard the landlord's voice shouting outside, "answer me, gentlemen! Answer me! Are you well? Are you safe? Speak, gentlemen! Answer me!"

Between his rough tones we heard sighs and ejaculations, the low talking of men, and the rustling of petticoats.

"Why, we're all right," I called back, and then came a chorus of congratulations and thanksgiving to all the saints from behind the door. Evidently there had been a little crowd in the hall, for we could hear them dispersing.

We talked the matter over as we were dressing. To tell the truth, I was thoroughly frightened, and felt sick of the whole business. I couldn't understand it, and the more I thought of it the more I disliked it. I didn't attempt to conceal my feelings, either. I said outright that I was scared and wanted to get away, and proposed to Harry that as soon as we had had our breakfast we should saddle our horses and ride off on the trail. From the stories we had heard since we reached the village I understood better than I had done what risk there was in such a lonely ride, but I would a great deal

rather be killed by a red man in the daylight than by a monster in the dark, and I said so. But Harry took quite a different view of the matter. The effect of choking on his disposition seemed to be the reverse of depression, and he talked in a vindictive way of our invisible assailant.

"No, you don't!" he said, when I tried to persuade him to leave. "Not much I go till I know what is the matter here. You couldn't drag me away with wild horses till I've had another wrestle with that thing!"

"Mercy, Harry!" said I; "I don't see why you want another; one would have finished you quite if I hadn't been there to help you. Look at your throat now; it's purple and red; you'll have to tie a handkerchief or something round it to make yourself presentable. Whatever that awful thing was, it was stronger than you or I. What can you want to meet it again for? Prudence is the better part of valor, and I propose to quit this horrible spot before I am an hour older."

"You'll quit it alone, then," he said, sulkily, "for I'm not going with you. I'm going to stay and see it out."

I reasoned and expostulated with him,

but all to no purpose. He was as obstinate as a mule. I could not face the possible Indians by myself, and still less could I leave him to confront alone the dangers which I believed threatened him if he remained. I told him that if he stayed, I did, and then we laid our plans. Harry had no theory at all to account for our strange experience; he simply said he would not go away until he had fathomed it. Whatever the risks might be, he wished, while wide-awake and in full possession of his faculties, to put out the light, and encounter the attack of our midnight enemy.

Through the previous day we had scarcely spoken of my adventure of the first night, having by tacit agreement alluded to it as a nightmare. Now, after what Harry had gone through, this explanation was no longer tenable. Still, we decided it would be better to say nothing of it to any one outside. When we issued from our room we found ourselves again the centre of interest for all the frequenters of the inn. Those who did not come forward to speak to us peeked at us from behind corners. A continuous procession passed through the room where we took breakfast, all on the alert for our every movement. The landlord

apologized by saying we were strangers, and every one was naturally struck by our elegant appearance, and also that, owing to our habit of late rising, the simple people of the town had become somewhat anxious lest it might be an illness or other untoward occurrence which had kept us in our room so long. I imagined that he either knew something of our adventure or suspected it, from the sharpness with which he looked at us. But we gave him no satisfaction, simply assured him that we were in the habit of sleeping late, that we were charmed to inspire interest in the bosoms of the appreciative inhabitants of San Jacinto, and should always endeavor to live up to the reputation for elegance which he so kindly imputed to us.

We sketched all day. When night came and we retreated to our room, it was with the intention of thoroughly investigating the mystery. We had already taken occasion to inspect the outside of the building in the daytime. The room in which we slept was part of an old adobe structure, so far gone to ruin that this was the only portion in good preservation. The walls of this one room, however, were perfectly solid. Nowhere was there a flaw in them. There could be no

possible entrance from the outside except by the door and small grated window in the hall.

When we locked our door for the night we placed some percussion-caps in such a way that they must explode if it were opened even a crack. Then we turned our attention to the inside of the chamber. We peered into every crack and cranny of the wall, which offered plenty of opportunity for such investigation. But in spite of its rough and irregular surface it was absolutely sound; the stones were heavy and well joined; there was not an aperture anywhere big enough for a man to get his fingers through, much less his whole body. The roof was perfectly tight. Then we turned our attention to the window, and examined that with special care; for I found that with Harry, as with me, the first premonition of approaching danger had been the passing of some indistinct dark body across its misty square. But here as elsewhere it was evidently impossible that any substantial form should have found entrance. The sides of the aperture were thick and strong, and the whole opening crossed by three iron bars as big as my thumb, let into the solid stone, and clamped down so securely that there could

be no chance of their ever having moved since they were put in. The intervals between them were scarcely two inches across.

We went all over the floor. It was made of rough stones set in the firm earth. Nowhere did it give a hollow sound, and its condition showed the surface could not have been disturbed for untold years. We took everything off the bed, and looked beneath it. We moved the two or three small pieces of furniture which had been set into the room since our arrival. Finally, absolutely satisfied that there was no avenue by which any human being could enter the apartment, we made our preparations for the night. Each set a chair at the head of the bed just within reach of his own hand, and on it a candle and a plentiful supply of matches. Our revolvers we laid, Harry under his pillow, and I on the chair beside me. As we calculated, the enemy could attack but one of us at a time, and as the other would be on the watch, it should be easy to overpower him from behind.

We lay down, fully dressed, on either side of the bed, and I blew out my candle.

"Are you all ready?" said Harry.

I cast a quick glance about the room, and said:

"Yes, ready."

He extinguished the remaining light. For a moment there was perfect silence. Then across the window we both saw, or rather felt than saw, through the darkness, a vague shape pass. Harry touched me with his elbow; the next second I felt my throat clutched in a grasp so fierce that all hope of freeing myself from it died within me. My one thought was that as the creature had attacked me, Harry would be able to rescue me, and as the clutch tightened I was filled with a blind fury at his delay. It was just then that a frantic plunge at my side made me aware that Harry, like myself, was fighting silently and wildly; his arms struck me as he hit out, and his kicks were as furious as his blows. I raised my hand again to tear, however vainly, at the thick fingers closed around my throat. There was but one hand there, and as my senses swam for want of breath I realized that the creature must be holding Harry and me both, one in each hand. In my struggle I had moved so far across the bed that I could not reach the matches. Yet I knew that there lay our only chance for life, and with a sudden

convulsive effort I managed, not to shake off the clutch, but in spite of it to press so far to one side that I felt my hand touch the edge of the chair. It gave me new strength to know myself so near to light and life, and with a second struggle I laid my hand upon the matches, raised and struck them against the side of the bed. I had never known such happiness before—I never shall again—as shot through my heart when my blurred eyes saw the first flicker of the tiny blue flame. The next instant, as the yellow blaze flared up, the awful constriction was gone from my windpipe. For a second I lay still, unable to do more than draw a faint and painful breath, then terror lest the tiny sticks should burn out and leave me in darkness nerved my fainting will. I put out my other hand, gathered more matches, kindled them at the first, and holding the bunch like a tiny torch, I leaned over and lighted the candle. Exhausted by the effort, I fell back fainting on the pillow.

When I came to, the candle was burning brightly. I opened my eyes with a sigh to drink in the luxury of the light, then closed them again in utter weariness, and lay without a thought, contented in the blissful consciousness that I

was alive and safe. I must have remained so for some time, when there suddenly went through my half-torpid brain a memory of Harry. I had not felt him move, and the thought alarmed me so that I sat up in bed, as if roused by an electric shock, and bent over him. His eyes were staring wide, but he lay motionless, and made no response when I called him by name. I laid my hand on his forehead. It was warm. So was his hand, though it dropped nervelessly from mine when I left hold of it. I fancied I could detect a faint breath drawn at long intervals, and a slight, but very slight, pulsation of the heart. There was evidently not a moment to be lost. I jumped from the bed, though I found I was so bruised and sore with struggling that every movement brought sharp pain. I ran to the door, and in spite of the unreasoning horror which attacked me of letting in the darkness, I flung it open and shouted with all my might for help. A few seconds of such clamor and I heard answering voices; a moment more, and it seemed as if people by the hundred, all bearing lamps, candles, lanterns, began to stream along the corridor. They flocked into the room, and it scarcely needed my few hasty words to set them to

work with Harry. Almost before I had spoken they had him stripped, and three or four active Mexicans were rubbing and kneading him like so many furies. The women flew for hot water and brandy. In a few moments a long shuddering sigh told that his vital forces were returning, and in a little more I had what was to me the ineffable satisfaction of seeing his eyelids close, and shut out the look of horror which had seemed stamped upon the eyeballs beneath them.

Of course we moved Harry out of that room immediately, but it took weeks of the most careful nursing before he could leave San Jacinto. During all that time, as you may well believe, I spent every moment I could spare from him in trying to fathom the causes of our horrible experience. But the more I searched the more inexplicable the whole affair became. At first I very naturally suspected that it was part of some scheme for robbery or murder on the part of the people of the inn, but I soon became convinced that they were perfectly innocent. There was no mistaking the sincerity of their concern for what had happened, nor the simple friendliness with which they helped to care for Harry. They were coarse and superstitious people, but not

criminal, and not unkindly. I detected, however, a certain shade of self-reproach, if not remorse, in their manner, and when I had probed this to the bottom I had found the only explanation for the whole affair which I ever reached. It was so utterly unreasonable that I can only give it to you and leave you to make what you can of it.

When we carried Harry to the miserable little adobe hut at the other end of the street, which was hastily abandoned for his use, I heard an uproar behind us in the direction of the inn, to which at the time I paid no attention. And during that afternoon, in the intervals between Harry's repeated fainting attacks, I heard shouts, mixed with hollow crashing sounds, for which I did not even try to account. But when in the course of a few days I permitted myself a short walk, I strolled in the direction of the inn, and there found that the ruinous structure in which we had lodged had been torn down. The big stones lay scattered in every direction, but not one remained on top of another. I asked the landlord what it meant.

"Ah, señor," said he, "it was the people that did it. They would not let the old building stand another hour. And

perhaps they were right, though the loss is mine. I am happier myself now that it is down. Who knows? Some time in the future I might have been tempted again by greed to let some luckless traveller have that room. The señor knows our people are very superstitious, and make more of such things than those in the great world. I wished to be wiser than my neighbors—the saints pardon me! When the traveller was found dead there fifteen years ago I made sure he had died of some sudden illness; and as for the two who died there in my father's time, and the others before that, I forced myself to disbelieve in them. But the señor's story of what happened the other night has taught me better. The place was accursed. It is well that it has been destroyed."

I asked him what he meant by calling it accursed, and he told me a long story of the old house, in which we had occupied the only habitable chamber. The building was over a hundred years old, and had been occupied for many years as an inn, whose visitors were the Indians and Mexicans at their seasons of festival, and such few travellers as made their way into that distant region. Some seventy-five years before it had been in the

possession of a man of enormous strength and evil disposition, under whose rule the place gained a bad reputation exactly in proportion as the landlord increased in wealth. Two or three travellers who were known to have money about them were never seen again after entering the doors; the landlord maintained that each of them had continued his journey the next day, starting before dawn, and there was no one to gainsay him. Others were found dead in bed with black marks on their throats, but beyond these there was nothing to throw suspicion on any one person, and the terror with which the brutal innkeeper inspired his neighbors was sufficient to crush out inquiry. At last, however, the landlord was caught in the act. An American engineer, carrying a large sum of money, had passed through the town, and taken shelter at the inn for the night. He made no secret of the money about him, perhaps because, being a very large and strong man and well armed, he had entire confidence in his ability to keep his own. But that night some wretched gringos, who were sleeping on the floor of the kitchen, heard a shout for help. Too timid to answer the call themselves, they ran for aid, and presently, with the assistance

of half a dozen others, burst in the door of the man's room. They found the man dead, and the landlord kneeling on the bed, with his knotted fingers still twisted round the throat of his victim. Before he could stir, while he was still blinking at the sudden light from the broken door, he was shot dead by another American, a miserable tramp, half gambler and half drunkard, who had joined in breaking open the door. The avenger, much lauded by the populace, had gone on his way the same day. The two bodies had been buried side by side outside the town. There was now no question as to the cause of the previous deaths and disappearances.

But the room in which such ghastly crimes had been committed had ever since been regarded with horror by the natives. According to their belief, the man who died in the commission of such a deed became an evil spirit, condemned to exist in darkness, and to repeat forever the awful crime in which his last moments had been spent. For years the chamber stood unoccupied; but when, after the lapse of a long time, stress of company made it necessary to use it, a strange confirmation of their faith was given to the superstitious.

The solitary occupant, who had retired the night before apparently in good health, was found dead in bed the next morning. There were not wanting those who affirmed that on his throat were the purple marks which testified to the presence of the midnight strangler. However that may have been, within the next thirty years three more deaths occurred in the same mysterious manner, and at the time of the last so great was the popular horror that not only was the room itself condemned as "accursed," but the whole building, now very ruinous, was abandoned, and a new one erected nearer the street. It was many years since the old room had been occupied when we took possession of it, and the temptation to the landlord to keep beneath his roof the two Americans, who to his eyes were simply mines of future wealth, had proved too strong to be overcome. He had salved his conscience by arguing that the tales about the room were a parcel of foolish superstitions not worthy the notice of any man of the world, and, in addition, that we were safe at any rate, since the evil spirit, if it still haunted those walls, could attack only in the darkness, while we were not only provided with abundant means of illumina-

tion, but had had clearly impressed upon us the importance of using them.

And now you know what has really been the matter with Harry Felters. He has never fully recovered since that night. It took me a year or two to get over the shock, but he never did. Whether there was some actual physical injury done to him, or whether the fright made too deep an impression on his nerves ever to be effaced, I cannot tell you. But from that time to this he has remained ailing and good for nothing, though most of the time he is reasonable and composed. He is subject, though, to occasional violent attacks of terror. But these come on him only in the dark, and if you have ever spent any time with him you will remember with what elaborate precautions he surrounds himself against being left even for a moment without light. He is a wreck.

Tio Juan

BY MAURICE KINGSLEY

"POOR little human, he ain't no bigger nor a flittermouse! Let him in here, you long-legged, sleek-hided Pedro, you! Come here, sonny. What ails ye?" And *Diamond Brand* Bill, *alias* Bill, *alias* William Irwin, whilom King of the Mexico-Texan border, "uncoiled" part of his length from the monte game, and motioning aside the others, beckoned up to his knee —where it stood, a little unclad brown figure—a boy of scarce ten years old.

There was nothing strange in such an apparition at the famous monte deal at Ojo Caliente just after the big "round-up" of the Encinillas Valley. General Terazas, owner of the valley, and ex-Governor of the state of Chihuahua, had ordered the "round-up," and to it came all the wild characters of the border. The Apaches were pretty bad at the time, but what did that matter?

"We're a short time living, and a long time dead," as Bill sagely remarked; and consequently under the western branches of the willows that fringed the clear stream welling out from the hill-side—the only water for miles round—sat or lounged a miscellaneous throng.

The monte table was only a sarapé spread on the arid yellow dust of the sand waste—not very inviting; but the fame of the Terazas "round-up" had gone forth far and wide, and at it might be seen many a well-known Southwestern face. Even Denver had sent down Gentleman Jim, a poor cousin, and decidedly lower type, of our old friend "Mr. John Oakhurst."

El Paso was represented by a would-be-respectable Jew; but whose diamond-studded fingers had been a leetle—just a leetle—too well known in Leadville the year before.

From Chihuahua came a young gentleman got up in all the gorgeous paraphernalia of Mexican ranchero dress—a black jacket laden down with silver buckles and clasps; an equally magnificent pair of trousers, so tight-fitting at knee, calf, and ankle that they seemed to have "growed on him when he was young." These topped by a sombrero

bedight and begirt with gold braid, gold lace, and gold fringe. However, these gems of the gambling nobility were few and far between; almost all were Mexican and border vaqueros in native picturesqueness of buckskins and heavy goat or jaguar skin overalls, sitting cross-legged and saturnine, whose only motion was to fling aside the enveloping sarapé and "rake down" or "put up" "onzas," five-dollar bills, or little piles of silver dollars clean and bright from the Chihuahua mint. Outside of the calls of the game—"Rey en la Puerta!" "Copo al siete!" etc., etc.—hardly a word was uttered. The great game of the meeting had just been lost and won, and even Bill was thankful for a change, when he espied the strange figure across the sarapé.

All, possibly, in the front row had noticed the face, but no attention was paid to it till Bill's exclamation, and across the sarapé glided the little brown figure, clad only in an old sheepskin tied round the neck, which, after resting a trembling hand on his knee, looked first into his kindly face, and then glared hollow-eyed round the circle as might some wild animal.

Not till then was any real interest

aroused, and a chorus of "Who is he?" "What is it?" "Where does he come from?" broke out in tones betokening more a sense of coming danger than of surprise.

"What is it, sonny?" again asked Bill, patting the matted black-brown head.

"Tio Juan," whispered the child. "He is dead! The *Brujo* came and stampeded the sheep and goats, and I hid—and—and —and—" sobbed the child.

"The *Brujo!* Who the devil's he? And how did Tio Juan die, you poor little starved sinner? Here you, Pedro, there, get some water and a tortilla. The child's 'most dead of drought, and his little drum's that 'cinched up' it hain't had no more in it nor a cayote these three days, I'll bet! Why, gosh dern my buckskins if the child hain't fainted!"

As Bill took the body in his arms and strode through the crowd to the adobe ranch, twenty-five yards away, in search of some of the "wimmin folk," many were the conjectures hazarded as to what had happened. The child was a stranger, evidently half dead of hunger and thirst; but whence or where? Who was Tio Juan, and how he had died, no one could imagine, till some one said, "Los Apaches."

The Apaches! The words were hardly spoken when every hand felt for its accustomed weapon, and a hasty look was given round the evening horizon of long dead plain northward, followed by a general movement towards the horses in or tied outside the corral; while those whose tamer mounts were trying to pick up a scant living in the sage-brush started on a run to bring them in.

"Los Apaches! Los Apaches!" ran from mouth to mouth, and not a man among them but remembered some personal encounter, or sad tales of the long-haired devils swooping down on to a friend's ranch and away again, to leave behind nor trace nor sign save a scene too revoltingly brutal to tell. And few present but cursed the "round-up," and its subsequent three days' gamble and debauch, at the thought of wives and children on many a lone ranch of northern Chihuahua that might be pasturing the little flock of goats and brown-woolled sheep this evening, or—?

"Vamonos! Let us go! To the ranches!" was the cry. "Hold on! Hold on! Who said it was the Apaches? Let's see Bill! Let's see the child first! Perhaps it is only a scare!" And they crowded into the ranch to find the poor

child lying at the end of the room, while the Big Bill—Bill, that terror of men—was bathing its head as tenderly as the Mexican woman in whose lap it lay moaning.

Not till near morning could the little thing give its story, and then only in disjointed fragments; but with such effect that at sunup fifty well-armed men were mounted and away under *Diamond Brand* Bill to avenge the murder of Tio Juan.

Of all the dreary lives that God in His wisdom has allotted to mortals, dull and unchanging from day to day, on the dreariest wastes of this continent the worst by far is that of the Mexican sheep-herder, whether on the American or Spanish side of the border, from southern Colorado to Zacatecas. To such a life had Tio Juan been born; in such he had existed (one can hardly say "lived") for sixty years, pasturing his master's herd of long-legged black, white, and mottled sheep and many-colored goats, oblivious of all save his herd. A human pariah by force of circumstances, not from other cause; making his little camp of brush where grass was earliest in spring, and moving slowly to more shel-

tered quarters in the fall, only to move again the next spring. Months might pass and he would never see a strange human face.

One afternoon, close to the Laguna de los Patos, a squad of Gringo cavalry, guided by Mexicans, came up to him suddenly as he was waking from siesta, and he learned that the Apaches had been raiding along the border, and that a war of extermination against them had been waging for a year around him.

His son had become his helper, had died, and a grandson — our little waif who broke up the monte game at Ojo Caliente—had only been brought into the world, 'twould seem, to follow, in his turn, the unending round of lifeless life, with the old man among the sheep and goats on that wide desert.

He was only a little animal, herding with the beasts he herded, and with as little knowledge of an outside world. All he felt was the great plain below, broken in places by rocky hills and mesas, and the great sky above; and the sensations—alas! too often realized—of heat, cold, hunger, and thirst. He burrowed under the scant branches of a low sage-bush to escape the noonday glare; and watched, panting, the great yellow columns of

sand whirls towering skyward, wandering to and fro across the desert; and put up a prayer of thanks that the herd was lying quietly round him to "La Santisima Virgen"; of whom he had vaguely heard as a beautiful lady in the cathedral of Chihuahua. Half an hour after, looking at his nearly empty gourd of warm, semiputrid water, he shook it to see if it would last out the day, and wondered why, away under the eastern sky, should appear and disappear, yet not exist in truth, those wide pools and lagoons of clear water, with animals standing among the reeds on the banks—such lagoons as Tio Juan had told him was the "Laguna de los Patos," miles to the northward, whence every year, just before the cold season, his grandfather brought a bundle of reeds to weave into a rough mat for a sparse shelter from the cold Norther sweeping down over the plain, and driving herder and herded shivering to the lee side of the rocks, where all snuggled together for mutual warmth.

Hunger! How well he knew it! 'Twas bad enough every day tramping weary and often foot-sore behind the sheep, munching at intervals a piece of dry tortilla; but worse, every three months,

when Tio Juan overstaid his time drinking at Ojo Caliente and forgot the poor boy eking out the last of the tortillas and frijoles and counting each morsel as it disappeared. Tio Juan, though, was very kind, and they had lots to eat for a month or so when the old man came back again.

He was almost companionless. The two shaggy short-tailed dogs, Lobo and Linda, bearlike and wolfish, did not make very good friends.

What he did really like were the fluffy long-eared white and gray jack-rabbits with black boots, which danced queer dances on their hind legs among the sage-brush every April.

Coyotes, the only other denizens of the waste, he hated naturally. They slunk through the brush, one ear cocked, the other dropped cunningly, picking up the toads, lizards, and beetles that ought to have served Lobo and Linda for supper. And if a lamb chanced to be left behind, and neither one of the old he-goats or the dogs scented them, they cut its throat and drank the hot blood, and then came to camp at night, wailing, chuckling, chattering, in hideous glee. They were the *Brujos* (witches) of the desert—children, Tio Juan said, of the great "cattle

devil,"* who, when the vaqueros were lying asleep by their cattle, would creep silently up to a bullock, and whisper something in its ear that started it in sudden fright, and in a second more the whole herd would dash madly over the plain in wild unreasoning stampede, regardless of watch-fires, vaqueros, and horses trampled out of existence at the cruel bidding of the "cattle devil."

Such and such like had been the daily round of life and thought of our poor little waif from four years old till about ten days before our story opens, when he was lying under a sheepskin one morning on the open plain, and watching the figure of Tio Juan, half lying, half sitting, by the fire of sage roots sputtering under the gray dawn, with Lobo and Linda yawning on the other side.

Hist! What is it? The dogs listen, and spring up growling; the flock is aroused and on foot; a dull noise 'way out in the darkness! What can it be?

* This is a universal superstition among the vaqueros, inspired, probably, from the suddenness of stampedes, which mostly happen without known cause or reason. The "cattle devil" of the cowboy is called "*Brujo de Los Ganados*" (witch of the flocks) by Mexicans.

No cattle are pasturing near, yet it sounds like the gallop of cattle or horses. A moment more, and then a wild exclamation from his grandfather, "Run, my son! run! To the rocks! Away—hide, and don't come out till I call! Away!" All is commotion, and the child dives and doubles through the brush and cactus for a mile to the rocky point at the mouth of the cañon, into which he burrows like a rock-rabbit, too frightened to know or listen to what is happening behind.

Anxiously he waits Tio Juan's call. The gray rocks begin to glow with light. The mesas each side of the cañon grow yellow, red, and then white under the summer sun. 'Tis weary waiting. He is hungry and thirsty, and the sun now strikes down from directly overhead. Only in the crevice he has chosen is a little nook of shade, growing less and less, less and less.

The sun is westerning now, and the heat from the rocks unbearable. More he cannot stand; and so, faint and frightened, he peeps over the rocks and across the plain.

Mustering courage, he creeps over rock after rock, and then, taking advantage of every little shrub, glides out tow-

ards the place he had left before dawn. By the way he finds a few sheep, and drives them tremblingly on; but close to camp an old ewe in the lead stops short, stamps, and with a frightened bleat scurries off to the right, followed by the others. 'Tis no use chasing them, and with a growing fear of disaster, he creeps straight forward. What is that shaggy brown thing lying under a shrub? What is snarling beyond? Another step; he sees it is old Lobo, stiff and grinning in death. He pulls the little knife from his girdle, puts a stone in his sling, and soon can make out the deserted camp-fire, by which coyotes are tearing at two dead sheep. There are others beyond. The fire is out, and by the little broken-down arbor of branches he finds the frijol pot upturned and empty. The brush is trampled down all round. Where is Tio Juan? He calls aloud. A sheep bleats here and there in answer; coyotes chatter and howl. He calls Linda and waits.

Lobo is dead, and there is no Tio Juan, no Linda! Perhaps they are getting together the flock scattered by the *Brujo*. He will run down to the pool to get some water, and cook something against their return. Those two sheep the coyotes were eating will make a good roast, and

the *Patron* always allows Tio Juan to eat the sheep killed by mischance. The pool is all trampled in with hoof-marks, and it is hard work to fill his little gourd and pot. Returning, he takes the flint and steel from his waistband, and soon has a fire started with some sage-brush roots. But on pulling back the boughs of the arbor to get at the corn and frijoles—Why, what is this? The hole in which they were stored is open and empty! Hardly a grain of either remains, and yet it is a full month before Tio Juan can go again to Ojo Caliente to draw more rations. Where can Tio Juan be? The flock must be dreadfully scattered by the *Brujo*. He will cache the meat in the hole, and round up all of them he can.

By nightfall he has perhaps one-fourth of them collected together, though he has seen many more out on the plain, but too far off to follow that night. Starting the fire again, he lies down by it to wait Tio Juan's coming.

What can have happened to Tio Juan? He was so wise. He knew all the trails far south to Chihuahua, and away up the great road to the *Médanos* (sand dunes), and where the first grass grew in the spring, and the best shelters and latest grass in the fall.

There was no use waiting longer, though, that night, so the half-famished lad broils a piece of meat, and lies down to doze till about midnight, when the coyotes return, chattering and snarling, and have to be driven away, and the sheep quieted down again.

The moon is going down, and it is very lonely. Even the pale moon was something cheering. And now there is nothing but the cold white stars, blinking like *Brujos'* eyes.

At last there only remained one little morsel of sheep meat. Nearly three-quarters of the whole flock had been rounded up. To stay here was to starve. To-morrow he would drive them southward, through the cañon into the Encinillas Valley, and borrow something to eat from the nearest ranch till Tio Juan came back.

There was nothing to pack up next morning. The frijol pot, his gourd, flint and steel, and sling were all his Lares and Penates. The last bit of meat had been eaten overnight; and, breakfastless, the boy at dawn headed the flock towards the cañon. They were not accustomed to feed that way, and gave trouble; the goats especially, racing over the point of rocks and turning back on to the plain.

At last a steady old ewe headed up the pass, a few more followed her, and then the mass of the herd, while the goats skirted the sides of the cañon, jumping from rock to rock.

What would Tio Juan say if he came back and did not find them? 'Twould be best to leave the flock at the head of the valley, and hurry on alone, so as to get back to camp, if possible, next evening.

The cañon closes in, and the gray western wall lights up under the sun in dazzling whiteness. What is that black thing at the head of the pass, hanging on the face of the rock? There is an old dead maguey-plant in a crevice just over it at the top of the wall. What can that black thing be? He creeps nearer and nearer. Holy Virgin! It is a man's body tied by one ankle to the maguey, and hanging over the cliff. Who can it be? Nearer and nearer he crouches. His heart stops beating. That old sheepskin waist-cloth he knows well. Can it be? Yes, it is—my God, it is!—Tio Juan hanging there dead!

With a wild wailing cry the boy turned and fled down the pass and out on to the wide plain northward, without an idea of where he was going in his grievous horror, till the project at last began shaping

itself in his small brain to reach Ojo Caliente, and get the people there to come back and bury Tio Juan.

From the miscellaneous crowd gathered round the sarapé at Ojo Caliente an equally motley one started down the big road southward next morning to find the body of Tio Juan, under command of old Bill Irwin.

The cañon was reached by evening; and there, sure enough, was the brown body hanging, ghastly, against the white cliff. A couple of riatas were knotted together, and the poor corpse, baked and shrivelled in the fierce heat of that oven-like atmosphere, was passed down to those below.

'Twas no "cattle devil" conceived such a death. One ankle, cut through flesh and sinew to the very bone, sustaining the whole weight of the body by the raw-hide dangling from the old magueyplant, showed it had been suspended there alive. This was Apache work. Well did they know his trade-marks!

It was turned over carefully, nay, reverently; and then the mummy form, with eyeless sockets and drawn parchment-like skin, drained of blood and moisture, was placed under a pile of stones by the

roadside, surmounted by a rude cross, that each passing Mexican might heap a stone and say an "Ave" over the grave of Tio Juan, and each vaquero might echo the words of *Diamond Brand* Bill as he musingly turned away:

"Trail branded for the kingdom come!"

Jamie the Kid

BY JOSIAH FLYNT

IT was my last night in San Francisco, and I could not leave without saying good-by to Old Slim. His place was almost empty when I strolled in, and he was standing behind his greasy bar counting the day's winnings. The *adios* was soon said, and I started for the street again. I had hardly left the bar when the door suddenly squeaked on its rickety hinges, and a one-armed man came in with a handsome "kid." He was evidently dying of consumption, and as he shuffled clumsily across the floor, with the boy following solemnly at his heels, I fancied that he wanted Slim to help him into a hospital. He called for his drinks, and asked Slim if he knew of any one "bound East" the next day.

"W'y, yes," Slim replied; "that young feller right back o' ye leaves ter-morrer: ain't that right, Cigarette?"

The man turned and looked at me. Grabbing my hand, he exclaimed:

"Well, I'll be jiggered! Where d'yu' come from? Don't remember me, eh? W'y, ye little beggar, have yu' forgotten the time we nearly croaked in that box-car jus' out of Austin—have yu' forgotten that?" and he pinched my fingers as if to punish me.

I scrutinized him closely, trying to trace in his withered and sickened face the familiar countenance of my old friend Denver Red.

"Yes, that's right, guy me!" he retorted, nervously. "I've changed a little, I know. But look at this arm"—pushing back his sleeve from the emaciated hand —"that crucifix ain't changed, is it? Now d'yu' know me?"

There was no longer any reason for doubt, for down in Texas I had seen New Orleans Fatty put that same piece on his lonely arm. But how changed he was! The last time we met he was one of the healthiest hoboes on the "Santa Fe," and now he could just barely move about.

"Why, Red," I asked, "how did this happen? You're nearly dead."

"Sleepin' out done it, I guess," he answered, hoarsely. "Anyhow, the crocus*

* Doctor.

says so, 'n' I s'pose he knows. Can't get well, neither. Ben all over—Hot Springs, Yellarstone, Yosem'ty, 'n' jus' the other day come up from Mex'co. Cough like a horse jus' the same. But say, Cig, drink out, 'n' we'll go up to Jake's—'s too public here. I've got a lot to tell yu', 'n' a big job fer yu', too: 'll yu' come? A' right. So long, Slim; I'll be in agen ter-morrer."

We were soon seated in a back room at Jake's. The boy stretched himself on a bench, and in a moment was asleep.

"Purty kid, ain't he?" Red said, looking proudly at the little fellow.

"An' he's a perfect bank, too, 'f yu' train 'im right. Yu' oughto seen 'im over in Sac* the other day. He drove some o' them Eastern stiffs nearly wild with the way he throws his feet. Give 'im good weather an' a lot o' women, 'n' he'll batter his tenner ev'ry day. They get sort o' stuck on 'im somehow, 'n' 'fore they know it they're shellin' out. Quarters ev'ry time, too. He don't take no nickels—seems to hate 'em. A Los Angeles woman tried him once, 'n' what d'yu' think he did? Told 'er to put it in an orphan 'sylum. Oh, he's cute, bet cher

* Sacramento.

life. But, Cig," and his voice dropped to a lower pitch, "he's homesick. Think of it, will yu', a hobo kid homesick! Bawls like the devil sometimes. Wants to see his ma—he's only twelve 'n' a half, see? If 'e was a homely kid, I'd kick 'im. If there's en'thing I can't stand, it's homely bawlin' kids. They make me sick. But yu' can't kick *him*—he's too purty—ain't he?" and he glanced at the slumberer.

"Yu' pull out at seven, do yu'?" he asked, after a pause.

"Well, Cig, I'm mighty glad it's you I found at Slim's. I was hopin' I'd meet some bloke I knew, but I feared I wouldn't. They're mos' all dead, I guess. Bummin' does seem to kill us lads, don't it? Ev'ry day I hear o' some stiff croakin' or gettin' ditched. It's a holy fright. Yer bound fer York, ain't yu', Cig? Well, now, see here; I've got an errand fer yu'. What d'yu' think 't is? Give it up, I s'pose? Well, yu' see that kid over there; purty, ain't he?" and he walked over to the bench and looked into the lad's face.

"Pounds his ear* like a baby, don't he?" and he passed his hand delicately over the boy's brow.

* Sleeps.

"Now, Cig," he continued, returning to his seat, "I want—you—to—take—this—kid—back—to—the—Horn.* That's where he lives. What d'yu' say?"

There was only one thing I could say. A few months more at the outside and Red would be gone, and it was probably the last favor I could do him in payment for the many kindnesses he had shown me in the early days.

"If en'thing happens to 'im, Cig, w'y, it's got to happen, I s'pose; but he's so dead stuck on seein' his ma that I guess he'll be purty foxy. I'd take 'im myself, but I'm 'fraid I can't pull through. It's a tough trip 'tween here 'n' Omaha, 'n' I guess he'll be safer with you. I hate to let 'im go at all, but the devil of it is I 'ain't got the nerve to hang on to him. Yu' see, I'm goin' to croak 'fore long—oh, you don't need to snicker; 't's a fact. A few more months 'n' there'll be one less hobo lookin' fer set-downs. Yes, Cig, that's straight. But that ain't the only reason I'm sendin' the kid home. I

* The Horn is a triangular extension of the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railway. It begins at Red Oak, Iowa, and runs southwest from there for about twenty miles, and then northwest to Pacific Junction for about twenty more.

oughto sent 'im home 'bout a year ago, 'n' I said I would, too, 'f I found 'im. I lied, didn't I? Ye-es, sir, 'bout twelve months ago I told his mother I'd fetch 'im back 'f I collared 'im. How's that fer a ghost-story, eh? Wouldn't the blokes laugh, though, if they'd hear it? Denver Red takin' a kid home! Sounds funny, don't it? But that's jus' what I said I'd do, 'n' I wasn't drunk nuther. Fill up yer schooner, Cig, 'n' I'll tell yu' 'bout it."

He braced himself against the wall, hugged his knees, and told me what follows.

"Yu' know where the Horn is right 'nough, don't yu'? Well, 'bout a year 'n' a half ago I got ditched there one night in a little town not far from the main line. 'Twas rainin' like the devil, 'n' I couldn't find an 'empty' anywheres. Then I tried the barns, but ev'ry one of 'em was locked tighter'n a penitentiary. That made me horstile. 'n' I went into the main street an' tackled a bloke fer a quarter. He wouldn't give me none, but 'e told me 'f I wanted a lodgin' that a woman called College Jane 'ud take me in. Says he: 'Go up this street till yu' strike the academy; then cross the field, 'n' purty soon yu'll find a little row o'

brown houses, 'n' in No. 3 is where Jane lives. Yu' can't miss the house, 'cause there's a queer sign hangin' over the front door, with a ball o' yarn 'n' a big needle painted on it. She does mendin'. I guess she'll take yu' in. She always does, anyhow.' Course I didn't know whether he was lyin' or not—yu' can never trust them Hoosiers—but I went up jus' the same, 'n' purty soon, sure 'nough, I struck the house. I knocked, 'n' in a minnit I heerd some one sayin', 'Is that you, Jamie?' Course that wasn't my name, but I thought like lightnin', 'n' made up my mind that 'twas my name in the rain, anyhow. So I says in a kid's voice, 'Yes, it's Jamie.' The door opened, 'n' there was one o' the peartest little women y'ever see.

"'Oh, I thought yu' wasn't Jamie,' she says. 'Come in—come in. Yu' must be wet.'

"I felt sort o' sheepish, but went in, 'n' she set me down in the dinin'-room. Then I told 'er a story. One o' the best I ever told, I guess—made 'er eyes run, anyhow. An' she fed me with more pie 'n' cake than I ever had in my life. Reminded me o' the time we thought we was drunk on apple pie in New England. Well, then she told me her story.

'Twa'n't much, but somehow I 'ain't forgotten it yet. Yu' see, she come from the soil, 'n' her man was a carpenter. After they'd ben West 'bout six years he up 'n' died, leavin' her a little house 'n' a kid. She called 'im Jamie. Course she had to live somehow, 'n' purty soon she got a job mendin' fer the 'cademy lads, 'n' she boarded some of 'em. That's the way she got her monikey.* See? Well, things went along purty well, 'n' she was spectin' to put the kid in the 'cademy 'fore long. He-e-e didn't like books very well—hung around the station mos' the time. Sort o' stuck on the trains, I s'pose. Lots o' kids like that, yu' know. Well, to wind up the business, one night when he was 'bout 'leven year old he sloped. Some bloke snared 'im, prob'ly, an' ever since she's ben waitin' 'n' waitin' fer 'im to come back. An' ev'ry night she fixes up his bed, 'n' 'f anybody knocks she always asks, 'Is that you, Jamie?' Funny, ain't it? Well, somehow the bums got on to 'er, 'n' ever since the kid mooched she's ben entertaining 'em. Gives them his room ev'ry time. An' she always asks 'em 'f they know where he is. She asked me too, 'n' made me promise 'f

* Nickname.

I found 'im that I'd send 'im home. Course I never expected to see 'im, but I had to say somethin'.

"Well, sir, six months afterward I was sittin' in Sal's place in K. C.* when who should come in but New York Barcas. He called me out, 'n' says, 'Red, wanto buy a kid?' As it happened, I did want one, so I asked 'im how much 'e wanted. He took me over to a joint 'n' showed me that kid over there on that bench. 'Give yu' a sinker,' I said. He was satisfied, 'n' I took the kid.

"Well, sir, as luck would have it, 'bout a week later the kid got so stuck on me that he told me his story. I didn't know what to do. He didn't wanto go home, 'n' I didn't want 'im to. Course I didn't tell 'im nothin' 'bout seein' his ma—that 'ud 'a' spoiled ev'rything. Well, I didn't say nothin' more about it, 'n' we come out here. I've had 'im now fer 'bout a year, 'n' I've trained 'im dead fine. W'y, Cig, he's the best kid on the coast. Yes, he is—but, as I've ben tellin' yu', he's homesick, 'n' I've got to get 'im back to the Horn. I'm 'fraid he won't stay there. He's seen too much o' the road; but I'll croak jus' a little bit easier from knowin'

* Kansas City.

that I sent 'im back. I'd like it if he'd stay, too; 'cause, to 'fess up, Cig, I ain't very proud o' this bummin', 'n' 'f 'e keeps at it he'll be jus' like me 'fore long. So when he wakes up I'm goin' to lecture 'im, 'n' I don't want you to laugh. May help, you know; can't tell."

Two hours later we were in the railway yards waiting for my train to be made up. There were still about fifteen minutes left, and Red was lecturing the kid.

"See here, kid," I heard him saying, "what's yu' learnt since I've had yu'—en'thing?"

"Bet cher life I has," the little fellow returned, with an assumed dignity that made even Red smile.

"Well, how much? Rattle it off now, quick!"

The boy began to count on his fingers:

"Batterin', one; sloppin' up, two; three-card trick, three; an'—an'—that song 'n' dance, four—four; an'—an' enhalin' cig'rettes, five—five—" Here he stopped and asked if he should take the next hand.

"Yes, go on; let's have the hull of it."

"Well, then, I knows that cuss-word

you taught me—that long one, you know —that's six, ain't it? Oh yes, 'n' I knows that other cuss-word that that parson told us was never forgiven—remember, don't you? Well, that's seven—seven. I guess that's about all—jus' an even seven."

"Ye sure that's all, kid?"

"Well, darn it, Red, ain't that enough fer a prushun? You don't know much more yerself—no, you don't, 'n' you 's three times old 's I am." And he began to pout.

"Now, kid, d'yu' know what I wants yu' to do?"

"Bet cher life I do! 'Ain' cher ben tellin' me fer the las' year? You wants me to be a blowed-in-the-glass stiff. Ain't them the words?"

"No, kid. I've changed my mind. Ye goin' home now, ain' cher?"

"Jus' fer a little while. I'm comin' back to you, ain't I?"

"No, yu' ain't, kid. Yer goin' home fer good. Cigarette's goin' to take yu', 'n' yu' mustn't come back. Listenin'?"

"Say, Red, has you gone bughouse? I never heerd you talk like that in my life."

"See here, kid," and there was a firmer tone in his voice, "we ain't foolin' now

—understan'? An' in about five minutes ye'll be gone. Now I wants yu' to promise that ye'll ferget ev'ry darn thing I've taught yu'. Listenin'?"

The kid was gazing down the track.

"Listenin'?" Red cried again.

The kid turned and looked at him. "Can't I enhale cig'rettes any more? Has I got to ferget them too?"

"Well, kid, yu' *kin* tell yer mother that I says yu' kin do that—but that's all. Now 'll yu' promise?"

"Gosh, Red, it 'll be hard work!"

"Can't help it—*yu' got to do it.* Yu' don't wanto be like me. Yu' wanto be somethin' dead fine—'spectable."

"Ain' chew somethin' dead fine? I heerd Frisco Shorty say oncet you was the fliest bloke in yer line west o' Denver."

"Yu' don't understan', kid," and he stamped his foot. "I mean like yer mother. Listenin'? Well, 'll yu' promise?"

The kid nodded his head, but there was a surprise in his eyes which he could not conceal.

The train was at last ready, and we had to be quick.

"Well, Cig, so long; take care o' yerself. Be good to the kid."

Then he turned to the boy. It was the tenderest good-by I have ever seen 'tween a "prushun" and his "jocker." A kiss—a gentle stroke on his shoulder—and he helped him climb into the box-car.

The last we saw of Red, as we stood at the door while the engine puffed slowly out of the yards, he was standing on a pile of ties waving his hat. Six months afterward I was told in the Bowery that he was dead.

The journey to the Horn was full of incident. For six long days and nights we railroaded and railroaded, sometimes on the trucks and the blind baggage, and again lying flat on top, dodging the cinders as they whizzed about our heads, and the brakeman as he came skipping over the cars to tax us for the ride. It was hard work, and dangerous too, at times, but the kid never whimpered. Once he wanted to, I thought, when a conductor kicked him off the caboose, but he faked a professional little laugh in place of it. And he also looked rather frightened one night when he nearly lost his grip climbing up the ladder of a cattle-car, but he was afterward so ashamed that it was almost pitiful. He was the "nerviest" child I ever travelled

with. Even on the trucks, where old natives sometimes feel squeamish, he disguised his fear. But he was at his best at meal-time. Regularly he would plant himself before me in waiter fashion, and say:

"Well, Cig'rette, what's it to be? Beefsteak 'n' taters 'n' a little pie—'ll that do?"

Or if he thought I was not having enough variety he would suggest a more delicate dish.

"How'll a piece o' chicken taste, eh?" And the least eagerness on my part sent him off to find it. It was not, however, an entirely one-sided affair, for I was in his service also. I had to protect him from all the hoboes we met, and sometimes it was not so easy as one might think. He was so handsome and clever that it was a temptation to any tramp to "snare" him if he could, and several wanted to buy him outright.

"I'll give ye five balls fer 'im," one old fellow told me, and others offered smaller sums. A Southern roadster tried to get him free of cost, and the tales he told him and the way he told them would have done honor to a professional story-teller. Luckily for me, the kid was considerably smarter than the average boy

on the road, and he had also had much experience.

"They's got to tell better short stories than them 'fore they get me!" he exclaimed, proudly, after several men had tried their influence on him. "I'm jus' as cute as they is, ain't I? I know what they wants—they think I'm a purty good moocher, 'n' they'll make sinkers out o' me. Ain't that it?"

None the less, I almost lost him one night, but it was not his fault. We were nearing Salt Lake City at the time, and a big burly negro was riding in our car. We were both sleepy, and although I realized that it was dangerous to close my eyes with the stranger so near, I could not help it, and erelong the kid and I were dozing. The next thing I knew the train was slowing up, and the kid was screaming wildly, and struggling in the arms of the negro as he jumped to the ground. I followed, and had hardly reached the track when I was greeted with these words: "Shut up, or I'll t'row de kid under de wheels."

The man looked mean enough to do it; but I saw that the kid had grabbed him savagely around the neck, and, feeling sure that he would not dare to risk his own life, I closed with him. It was a

fierce tussle, and the trainmen, as they looked down from the cars and flashed their lanterns over the scene, cheered and jeered.

"Sick 'em!" I heard them crying. "Go it, kid—go it!"

Our train had almost passed us, and the conductor was standing on the caboose, taking a last look at the fight. Suddenly he bawled out:

"Look out, lads! the express 's comin'!"

We were standing on the track, and the negro jumped to the ditch. I snatched the kid from the ground and ran for the caboose. As we tumbled on to the steps the "con" laughed.

"Didn't I do that well?" he said.

I looked up the track, and, lo and behold, there was no express to be seen. It was one of the kind deeds which railway men are continually doing for knights of the road.

As we approached the Horn the kid became rather serious. The first symptom I noticed was early one morning while he was practising his beloved "song 'n' dance." He had been shaking his feet for some time, and at last broke out lustily into a song I had often heard sung by jolly crowds at the "hang-out":

"Oh, me an' three bums,
Three jolly old bums,
We live like royal Turks.
We have good luck
In bumming our chuck.
To hell with the man that works!"

After each effort, if perchance there had been one "big sound" at all like Red's, he chuckled to himself: "Oh, I'm a-gettin' it, bet cher life! Gosh! I wish Red was here!" And then he would try again. This went on for about half an hour, and he at last struck a note that pleased him immensely. He was just going to repeat it, and had his little mouth perked accordingly, when something stopped him, and he stared at the floor as if he had lost a dime. He stood there silently, and I wondered what the matter could be. I was on the point of speaking to him, when he walked over to the door and looked out at the telegraph poles. Pretty soon he returned to the corner where I was reading, and settled down seriously at my side. In a few moments he was again at the door. He had been standing in a musing way for some time, when I saw him reach into his inside coat pocket and bring out the tattered bits of pasteboard with which he did his three-card trick. Unfolding the packet,

he threw the paper on the track, and then fingered over each card separately. Four times he pawed them over, going reluctantly from one to the other. Then, and before I could fancy what he was up to, he tossed them lightly into the air, and followed them with his eye as the wind sent them flying against the cars. When he turned around, his hands were shaking and his face was pale. I cruelly pretended not to notice, and asked him carelessly what was the matter. He took another look at the world outside, as if to see where the cards had gone, and then came over to the corner again. Putting his hands in his trousers pockets, and taking a long draw at his cigarette, he said, the smoke pouring out of his nostrils, "I'm tryin' to reform."

He looked so solemn that I did not dare to laugh, but it was all I could do to keep from it.

"D'ye think I'll make it go?" he asked, after a pause, during which his feet had tried to tempt him from his good resolution, and had almost led him into the forbidden dance. Almost every hour from that time on he asked that same question, and sometimes the childish pathos that he threw into his voice and manner would have unmanned an old stager.

The last day of our journey we had a long talk. He was still trying to reform, but he had come to certain conclusions, and one of them was that he could not go to school any more; or, what was more to the point, that he did not see the need of it.

"Course I don't know ev'rything," he explained, "but I knows a lot. W'y, I kin beat Red figgerin' a'ready, an' I kin read things he can't, too. Lots o' words he don't know 't I does; an' when he's drunk he can't read at all, but I kin. You oughto seen us in Cheyenne, Cig." And the reminiscence made him chuckle. "We was both jagged, 'n' the copper served a paper on us, *'n' I had to read it to Red.* Ain't that purty good? Red said 'twas, anyhow, 'n' he oughto know, oughtn't he? No, I don't think I need much schoolin'. I don't wanto be President of the country; 'f I did, p'r'aps I oughto know some more words; but seein's I don't, I can't see the use o' diggin' in readers all the while. I wish Red had given me a letter 'bout that, 'cause ma 'n' I'll get to fightin' 'bout it dead sure. You see, she's stuck on puttin' me tru the 'cademy, 'n' I'm stuck on keepin' out of it, 'n' 'f we get to scrappin' agen I'm afraid I won't reform. She'll kick 'bout

my smokin', too; but I've got her there, ain't I? Red said I could smoke, didn't 'e—h'm? Tell ye what I guess I'll do, Cig. Jus' after I've kissed 'er I'll tell 'er right on the spot jus' what I kin do. Won't that be a good scheme? Then, you see, she can't jaw 'bout my not bein' square, can she? Yes, sir, that's jus' what I'll do." And he rubbed his tattooed hands as if he had made a good bargain.

The next morning, just as the sun was rising over the prairie-line, our train switched off the main road, and we were at last rolling along over the Horn. The kid stood by the door and pointed out the landmarks that he remembered. Erelong he espied the open belfry of the academy.

"See that cup'la, Cig?" he cried. "Dad helped to build that, but 'e croaked doin' it. Some people says that he was jagged, 'cause he tumbled. Ma says the sun struck 'im."

A few minutes later the train stopped at the watering-tank, and my errand was done. There was no need to "jocker" the boy any longer. His welfare depended upon his mother and his determination to reform. He kissed me good-by, and then marched manfully up the silent street toward the academy. I watched him till the train pulled out.

Thus ended one of the hardest trips of my life in Hobo-land.

One warm summer evening, about three years after leaving the Horn, I was sitting in a music-hall in the Bowery. I had long since given up my membership in the hobo fraternity, but I liked to stroll about now and then and visit the old resorts. And it was while on such an excursion that I drifted into the variety show. I watched the people as they came and went, hoping to recognize some old acquaintance. I had often had odd experiences and renewal of friendships under similar circumstances, and as I sat there I wondered who it would be that I should meet that night. The thought had hardly recorded itself when some one grabbed my shoulder in policeman style, and said, "Shake!" I looked around, and found one of the burliest rowdies in the room. He turned out to be a pal that I had known on the New York Central, and, as usual, I had to go over my remembrances. He also had yarns to spin, and he brought them so up to date that I learned he was just free of a Virginia jail. Then began a tirade against Southern prisons. As he was finishing it he happened to remember

that he had met a friend of mine in the Virginian limbo. "Said 'e knew ye well, Cig, but I couldn't place 'im. Little feller; somethin' of a kid, I guess; up fer thirty days. One o' the blokes called 'im the Horn kid, 'n' said 'e use to be a fly prushun out in the coast country. Ole Denver Red trained 'im, he said. Who is he? d'ye know 'im? He was a nice little feller. Why, what's wrong, Cig? Ye look spilled."

I probably did. It was such a disappointment as I had hardly imagined. Poor kid! He probably did so well that his mother tried to put him into the academy, and then he "sloped" once more. I told the tramp the tale I have just finished. He was too obtuse to see the pathetic side of it, but one of his comments is worth repeating:

"Ye can't do nothin' with them kids, Cig. After they's turfed it a bit they're gone. Better let 'em alone."

But I cannot believe that that kind-hearted little fellow is really gone. Whoever meets him now, policeman or philanthropist, pray send him back to the Horn again.

THE END